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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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Messi's event turns messy in Kolkata

VIPs crowd footballer, fans vandalise stadium as he leaves in 20 mins due to 'mismanagement'

KOLKATA, 13 DEC

What was billed as a marquee sporting spectacle descended into chaos at Kolkata's Salt Lake Stadium on Saturday, as angry fans vandalised property after failing to get a clear glimpse of football icon Lionel Messi.

Police detained the prime organiser over alleged mismanagement, while West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee ordered a high-level inquiry and apologised to disappointed supporters.

Thousands of fans, some of whom paid up to Rs 12,000 for tickets, had gathered at the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan to see the Argentina World Cup-winning captain. However, frustration mounted when Messi's appearance was brief, tightly controlled and largely obscured as VIPs and ministers surrounded him.

His tour began with the unveiling of a 70ft (21m) statue of himself in Kolkata, which had been assembled over the course of 27 days by a 45-strong crew.

Messi arrived at the stadium around 11.30 am along with Luis Suárez and Rodrigo De Paul. His vehicle was parked near the touchline and, as he stepped onto the pitch, he was quickly surrounded, leaving spectators in the galleries straining for a view. He walked only a short distance, waved briefly amid chants of "Messi, Messi", and remained barely visible from large sections of the stadium. Several fans complained that even the giant screens failed to provide a clear view.

Anger spilt over when it became evident that Messi would not complete the planned lap of the stadium. Instead, he turned back midway and was escorted out after around 20–25 minutes. As news of his early exit spread, sections of the crowd turned hostile, ripping up fibreglass seats, hurling bottles and plastic chairs onto the pitch, tearing down sponsor hoardings and attempting to breach barricades. Eyewitnesses said the situation worsened after organisers, including chief organiser Satadru Datta, were no longer visible on the ground. Protesters raised slogans demanding the arrest of Datta and state Sports Minister Aroop Biswas, accusing them of gross mismanagement.

Despite attempts by Datta, Sports Minister Aroop Biswas and DGP Rajeev Kumar to persuade Team Messi to continue, the entourage decided to leave. Repeated announcements asking unauthorised persons to vacate the pitch went largely unheeded as hundreds of spectators spilled onto the field, pulled down temporary tents and damaged equipment.

Police struggled to contain the crowd, prompting the deployment of the Rapid Action Force. Some protesters were baton-charged to restore order, police sources said. —*PTI*

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As word of Messi's early exit spread, sections of the crowd turned hostile, ripping up fibreglass seats, hurling bottles and plastic chairs onto the pitch, tearing down sponsor hoardings and attempting to breach barricades ***PHOTOS: PTI***

Tenders invited for Bengaluru's second airport

BENGALURU, 13 DEC

The Karnataka State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation has issued a tender for a consultancy firm to prepare a location suitability and technical-financial feasibility report for the State's proposed second international airport. According to Infrastructure Development Minister M B Patil, the state government has identified sites at Choodahalli and Somanahalli on Kanakapura Road, along with another location near Nelamangala, for the proposed airport. The selected firm will have five months to submit a detailed report to the government outlining findings on key parameters at all three locations, including rainfall and topography, availability of power and water, civic infrastructure, surrounding population, regional development, and potential noise pollution. —*PTI*

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Gujarat family kidnapped in Libya

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

A couple and their three-year-old daughter from Gujarat's Mehsana district have allegedly been kidnapped in Libya while attempting to migrate to Portugal, officials said on Saturday. Kismatsinh Chavda, his wife Heenaben and their daughter Devanshi, residents of Badalpura village, were reportedly taken hostage in Benghazi, with kidnappers demanding a ransom of Rs 2 crore. The family was travelling with the help of a Portugal-based agent and was hoping to join Chavda's brother, who lives in Portugal. According to Mehsana Superintendent of Police Himanshu Solanki, the family flew from Ahmedabad to Dubai on November 29 before travelling onward to Libya, where they were abducted. He said the agents involved were not Indian nationals. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X@IRMILITARYMEDIA

Indians on oil tanker seized by Iran near Oman

TEHRAN, 13 DEC

Iran has seized an oil tanker in the Gulf of Oman, Iranian media said on Friday, adding that 18 crew members from India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh were aboard the ship.

"An oil tanker carrying six million litres of contraband diesel fuel has been boarded off the coast of the Sea of Oman," the Fars news agency said, quoting an official from the southern province of Hormozgan. "The vessel had disabled all its navigation systems," it added.

Iranian forces regularly announce the interception of ships it says are illegally transporting fuel in the Gulf.

Retail fuel prices in Iran are among the lowest in the world, making smuggling it to other countries a profitable business.

Iran seized an oil tanker in Gulf waters last month "for carrying an unauthorised cargo," dismissing suggestions that it was a retaliatory measure against another country.

The latest interception came two days after the United States seized an oil tanker off the coast of Venezuela. The US had said that the ship's captain was transporting oil from Venezuela and Iran.

The US Treasury sanctioned Venezuela in 2022 for alleged ties to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Hezbollah. —*Agencies*

Lotus blooms in Kerala's capital as BJP trounces LDF

T'PURAM, 13 DEC

Lotus bloomed in Kerala's capital as the BJP-led NDA achieved a resounding win in the polls for the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation, snatching it from the CPM-led LDF, marking an end to 45 years of Left rule in the local body.

The win in the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation will act as a boost for the BJP in the 2026 Assembly polls.

Of the 101 wards in the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation, the BJP won 50, LDF 29, and UDF 19. Two wards were won by Independents. The BJP is one seat short of a majority.

In the fight for the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation, the BJP's campaign highlighting the corruption during LDF's tenure appears to have worked.

The NDA retained the Palakkad municipality after a close battle with the Congress-led UDF, and also wrested the Thrippunithura Municipality from the UDF.

In Thrissur, from where Suresh Gopi won in the Lok Sabha polls last year, the BJP won 18 of the 46 wards in Kodungallur Municipality, eight in Thrissur Corporation, two each in Guruvayoor and Vadakkancherry municipalities, seven in Kunnamkulam Municipality, six in Irinjalakuda Municipality and one in Chalakudy Municipality. The BJP-led front won 1,085 grama panchayat wards and 44 block panchayat wards in Kerala, according to the State Election Commission (SEC) figures at 2.30 pm. The BJP's Sabarimala gold loss campaign helped it to win 142 grama panchayat wards, six block panchayat wards and 21 municipality wards in Pathanamthitta district, where the Lord Ayyappa shrine is located. —*PTI*

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Kerala BJP President Rajeev Chandrasekhar celebrates led NDA's victory in in Thiruvananthapuram on Saturday ***PHOTO: PTI***

> **That is the beauty of democracy. The people's verdict must be respected, whether for the UDF overall or for the BJP in my constituency** —Shashi Tharoor, Cong T'puram MP on BJP's win

Cabinet approves single higher education board

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

The Union Cabinet gave its formal approval on a Bill seeking to establish a single unified regulator for higher education to facilitate universities and other higher educational institutes become independent and self-governing. The proposed legislation, which was earlier christened the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) Bill, has now been named Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhikshan Bill.

A single higher education regulator, which was proposed in the new National Education Policy (NEP), looks to replace the University Grants Commission (UGC), the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), and the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE). Currently, the UGC oversees non-technical higher education in the country, the AICTE oversees technical education, while the NCTE is the regulatory body for teachers' education.

The Commission is proposed to be set up as a single higher education regulator, though medical and law colleges will remain outside its ambit. Officials said it is expected to have three major roles—regulation, accreditation, and setting professional standards. Funding, considered a fourth vertical, is not proposed to fall under the regulator; autonomy for funding is expected to remain with the administrative ministry. —*PTI*

WFH not must for govt staff amid smog: Delhi HC

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

The Delhi High Court dismissed a plea by a senior scientist, working with an organisation funded by the Centre, that he be allowed to work from home due to poor air quality on his office premises.

The High Court said the contention of the petitioner that he is entitled to work from home in terms of GRAP guidelines is "misplaced" as a perusal of it revealed that it vests a discretionary and not a mandatory obligation upon the Central Government to take an appropriate decision for permitting its employees to avail the work from home facility. In view of medical exigencies cited by the petitioner, the court said that in case his health condition so warrants, he should be at liberty to request his employer for a transfer out of Delhi. The employer should favourably consider the request, it said.

"The objective behind the implementation of GRAP cannot be construed as to create an enforceable personal right upon individual employees. It rather confers an obligation upon institutions/authorities/citizens to adhere to and support in maximising the implementation of pollution-mitigating solutions,"

Justice Sachin Datta said in an order on 9 December.

The petitioner is a 'Scientist-E' with the Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DOT) and sought work from home, citing hazardous air and respiratory issues.

He said the authorities should be directed to immediately ensure compliance with all Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) orders issued by the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) in his office premises.

50% WFH KICKS IN

Delhi government has directed 50 per cent staff at offices to work from home as the air quality level dropped to the 'severe' level in the national capital and its adjoining areas. The decision came after the Air Quality Index (AQI) of the national capital plunged to 441 (Severe) at 6 pm on Saturday. —*PTI*

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Delhi docs report 20-30% jump in respiratory cases

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

Amid high pollution levels, hospitals in Delhi are witnessing a 20 to 30 per cent spike in respiratory patients, including many first-time cases and young adults, doctors said.

They emphasised that the pollution crisis is a serious public health risk rather than a seasonal inconvenience.

On Saturday, the city's air quality deteriorated further, slipping from the "very poor" to the "severe" category, a level that also affects otherwise healthy individuals, with readings crossing 400 in the red zone.

Doctors said pollution levels worsen each year, and the number of people affected by poor air quality is increasing.

Several doctors in Delhi said outpatient

200 DETAINED ON SUSPICION OF TERROR IN KASHMIR

SRINAGAR, DEC 13

Jammu and Kashmir Police on Saturday detained around 200 people suspected of being over-ground workers (OGWs) of terrorist outfits during a valley-wide crackdown aimed at dismantling support networks. Coordinated raids were carried out across multiple locations, including Srinagar, as part of an operation launched in November to disrupt logistical, financial and ideological backing for militancy.

NIA declares Delhi blast accused proclaimed offender

Meanwhile, an NIA court in Srinagar declared absconding Delhi blast accused Dr Muzaffar Ahmad Rather a proclaimed offender. Rather, allegedly part of a white-collar terror module behind the November 10 car blast near Delhi's Red Fort, is believed to be in Afghanistan. The court directed him to appear on 28 January, 2026. — *PTI*

BLAMES DELIVERY GUY

Ricky Kej alleges theft at Bengaluru home

BENGALURU, 13 DEC

Grammy-winning music composer Ricky Kej said on Saturday that he thinks that a Zomato food delivery platform driver had entered his house and stolen a sump cover.

In a post on social media platform 'X', the Padma Shri awardee wrote, "I was robbed! Dear @zomato @zomatocare, looks like one of your drivers entered my home on Thursday and stole our sump cover. This was at 6 pm. Quite bold of them!"

He alleged that the individual had visited the premises about 15 minutes earlier to conduct what he described as a "recce" before returning to trespass and steal.

Grammy winner Ricky Kej in an Instagram post said that he was 'robbed' by a delivery guy ***PHOTO: INSTAGRAM/@RICKYKEJ***

Kej also shared CCTV footage from two angles, screenshots of the person's face, and details of the vehicle on which the suspect had arrived, including its registration number.

Tagging Zomato and Bengaluru City Police, Kej sought assistance to identify the person.

He also urged the public to remain cautious, stating, "This can happen to you too!"

Responding to the post, Zomato Care said, "Ricky, this is really concerning, and we certainly don't encourage such behaviour from our delivery partners. . We request you to kindly share your mobile number with us via DM so we can connect with you." —*PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Man murdered in T Narasipura town of Mysuru

MYSURU, 13 DEC

A 32-year-old man was brutally murdered in T Narasipura, Mysuru, during the early hours of Saturday. The victim, identified as Vinod, was a resident of Old Tirumakudalu. According to local police, he was attacked by miscreants wielding a long knife. After the assault, the attackers fled the scene, leaving the weapon behind. Local authorities promptly arrived at the scene, with a dog squad and fingerprint experts aiding the investigation. The long knife used in the crime has since been recovered. The T Narasipura police have registered a case and have initiated a manhunt to apprehend those responsible. Investigation into the incident is currently ongoing. *—Salar News*

BJP MPs meet Modi, discuss governance

BENGALURU, NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

BJP Members of Parliament from Karnataka on Friday met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi and discussed ways to strengthen people-centric governance and improve the delivery of welfare schemes in the State. During the interaction, the Prime Minister emphasised that governance must remain focused on the needs of ordinary citizens and called upon MPs to ensure that Central government initiatives reach every section of society in Karnataka. Speaking after the meeting, Bengaluru South MP Tejasvi Surya said the Prime Minister not only reviewed developmental and organisational matters but also enquired about the well-being of the MPs. He said the Karnataka MPs would work collectively to create awareness about Union government programmes, ensure their effective implementation and maximise benefits for citizens. *—ANI*

Mysuru Hanuman Jayanthi march passes peacefully

MYSURU, 13 DEC

The seventh edition of the Hanuman Jayanthi procession by Hanuman Jayanthotsava Celebration committee took place peacefully in Mysuru on Saturday. The government deployed tight security as thousands of people took part in the procession. Some 1,500 police personnel were deployed as previous processions around the Mysuru area, such as Hunsur and Srirangapatna, saw communal disturbance. Former minister and MLA GT Devegowda, former MP Pratap Simha, Hunsur MLA GD Harish Gowda flagged off the procession near Kote Anjaneyaswamy temple. The tableaux carrying the decorated idols of Lord Hanuman, Lord Rama were the main attraction as folk dancers added glitter to the festivities. *—Salar News*

DKS PUSHES FOR APARTMENT BILL

I am not afraid of your threats, have braved Modi, Shah, DKS says while meeting residents

BENGALURU, 13 DEC

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar pushed for the Karnataka Apartment (Ownership and Management) Bill 2025 in a fiery interaction with citizens.

The bill, applicable across the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) area, seeks a clear transfer of property rights and undivided share (UDS) from builders or promoters to owners and strengthening owners' associations with formation rules, registration mechanisms, and enforcement power for bylaws. It also aims to consolidate governance under one act rather than the previous multiple.

"Nineteen percent of Bengaluru residents are apartment dwellers. No government tried to change the Apartment Bill since it was introduced in 1972. Our government is trying to," the Bengaluru Minister said during an interaction with representatives of Bengaluru Apartment Associations on Saturday.

He issued a stern warning against opposition to the bill. Do you not know who you are talking to, he said after resident wrote a letter to him.

"One Mr Kiran Hebbar has written a threatening letter saying that the apartment owners could influence the GBA elections if we don't listen to them. We are not scared of threats," Shivakumar remarked.

Shivakumar read out the letter by Hebbar, a representative of the association. It said the association didn't want to wait for two-and-a-half more years for the bill. "The Congress party had promised us. We represent a significant voting bloc, influence approximately 1.3 crore people of Bengaluru, of the 1.5 crore population," the letter said.

Shivakumar said that he had returned from jail without getting scared of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah. "I have owned and built many apartment complexes and know the voting pattern in apartment areas."

"Warning me and cautioning me?.... Gandhi had said if you want to control yourself, use your brain. If you want to control others, use your heart. I use my heart to control," Shivakumar continued.

The Deputy CM said the Congress had not made any promise. Instead, the 18 BJP MLAs did. "I am telling you that you can't play a game with me as you do with others. We have more brain power than you."

Simultaneously, he sought apartment resident's support for the upcoming GBA election. Citizens can provide suggestions to the apartment bill by sending an email to gbasuggesion@gmail.com within the next 10 days *—Salar News*

DyCM DK Shivakumar during a talk with Bengaluru Apartments Associations, at Vidhana Soudha, Saturday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

> **We are not scared of threats... I have owned and built many apartment complexes and know the voting pattern in apartment areas... You can't play games with me. We have more brain power than you**
>
> -DK Shivakumar, Deputy Chief Minister

Minister, not master: DKS' don't threaten barb draws flak

BENGALURU, 13 DEC

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar saying that the government wasn't scared of threats received strong reaction from the Opposition and City leaders.

"Is this governance or bullying," BJP leader R Ashoka wrote on X. Instead of answering genuine questions from Apartment Associations, DyCM chooses intimidation - boasting about his past, flexing power, and openly threatening citizens by talking about "voting patterns" of apartment residents."

Apartment owners are not vote banks, he said.

Similarly, the JD(S) said Shivakumar was threatening people like a "thug".

Former Infosys CFO TV Mohandas Pai reminded Shivakumar that he was a "Minister and not our master". *—Salar News*

Apartment bill must address legal vacuums: Tejasvi

BENGALURU, 13 DEC

Bengaluru South MP Tejasvi Surya wrote a letter to Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, saying the proposed Karnataka Apartment (Ownership and Management) Bill, 2025 should address the legal vacuum from the previous fragmented laws. He said the legislation should address the lack of a simple, uniform process for association registration by creating a dedicated enforcement and dispute-resolution authority and integrating with national anti-fraud measures like CERSAI.

It will affect the rights of lakhs of Bengaluru residents, the BJP MP noted, adding that the bill is an opportunity for the government to modernise laws to align with the Real Estate (Regulation And Development) Act, 2016 (RERA). The act must provide timeframes for transfer of common areas after purchases. Noting that under previous laws, buyers have no easy mechanism to form a recognised associations, he said the government must address the issue. *—Salar News*

DYCM CALLS IT PROOF

Ex-BJP MLA, son named in Aland 'vote theft' chargesheet

Former Aland MLA Subhash Guttedar; his son Harshanand *PHOTO: X*

BENGALURU, 13 DEC

The SIT, which is probing the 'vote chori' (vote theft)' case in the Aland Assembly constituency in the 2023 Karnataka Assembly elections, has filed a charge sheet naming seven people, including a former BJP MLA, his son and his close aide.

The charge sheet, filed before the First Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate in Bengaluru by the Special Investigation Team, is about alleged attempts to remove the names of 5,994 voters.

CID sources said the charge sheet explains in detail the modus operandi adopted to delete voters' names.

Those named in the charge sheet are Subhash Guttedar, a four-time former MLA from Aland, his son Harshanand Guttedar, his secretary, Tipperudra, three Kalaburagi-based data centre operators – Akram Pasha, Mukaram Pasha and Mohammed Ashfaq – and Bapi Adya from West Bengal.

Adya was the first person to be arrested in the case. He allegedly operated a website, OTPbazaar, which was linked to a US-based platform to provide an 'OTP bypass' facility. He was later released on bail.

A special court had earlier granted anticipatory bail to Guttedar, his son and Tipperudra.

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said the charge sheet was proof of "vote chori", saying the issue will be raised in the State Assembly on Monday.

He said that he will be going to New Delhi over the Nation Herald case. He added that there will be a massive rally in Delhi over the "vote theft".

— Salar News with agencies

'VACCINATE STRAYS, DON'T LOCK THEM'

BENGALURU, 13 DEC

A student-led organisation urged the State government to scale up scientific dog population management through Animal Birth Control (ABC) and Anti-Rabies Vaccination (ARV) programmes across the state, instead of investing heavily in dog shelters.

Students for Streeties made the appeal at a press conference in the City, attended by representatives of animal welfare organisations and student groups, including All Paws Community, Charlie's Animal Rescue Centre (CARE) and Citizens for Animal Birth Control.

Actor Pooja Gandhi, through a video message, appealed to the State government to strictly implement the ABC programme.

The speakers said the City has remained free of human rabies due to strong systems such as a rabies helpline, ring vaccination and sustained ABC efforts. They stressed that community caregiving, coupled with robust ABC and ARV programmes, is the most effective and humane way to address dog bites and rabies.

They appealed to the State government to file an affidavit in the court, committing to Statewide ABC implementation. *—PTI*

K'taka wants to make TN a desert with Mekedatu: EPS

CHENNAI, 13 DEC

AIADMK General Secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami claimed that the sole aim of the Congress government in Karnataka was to convert Tamil Nadu into a desert with Mekedatu dam project.

The Karnataka government proceeding to construct a balancing reservoir at Mekedatu disregards the adverse implications for Tamil Nadu, he said, and blamed the ruling DMK in Tamil Nadu for the present "unfortunate situation."

"The DMK government under Chief Minister MK Stalin did not present strong arguments on behalf of Tamil Nadu through lawyers before the Cauvery Management Authority and the Supreme Court on the issue of the livelihood of Tamil Nadu people, and had conducted itself half-heartedly," Palaniswami said on X. Palaniswami's reaction comes after the Karnataka government formed an expert team to expedite the Mekedatu dam project. Karnataka has hailed the Supreme Court order.

On Friday, Tamil Nadu Water Resources Minister Duraimurugan said the Tamil Nadu government has filed a review petition before the Supreme Court and also submitted a detailed plea before the CWC against the Mekedatu balancing reseviour. The submission was made to the Central Water Commission (CWC) on 9 December, stating how the project will be detrimental to Tamil Nadu and to the order of the Supreme Court, he said. *—PTI*

- AIADMK General Secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami said the sole aim of the Mekedatu balancing reservoir project was to make Tamil Nadu into a desert

Tenders invited for 2nd Bengaluru airport

BENGALURU, 13 DEC

The Karnataka State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation has invited tenders to select an expert consultancy firm to prepare a location suitability and comprehensive technical and financial feasibility report for the proposed second international airport for the State capital.

The last date for submission of applications is 12 January, 2026, Infrastructure Development Minister MB Patil said on Saturday.

The State government has identified sites at Choodahalli and Somanahalli on Kanakapura Road, along with another location near Nelamangala, for the proposed airport, Patil said.

A high-level team from the Airports Authority of India has inspected these locations and submitted a preliminary report, he said.

"The consultancy firm selected through the tender process will be required to submit a detailed technical and financial feasibility report to the government within five months," he added.

Patil said that firms that have executed projects worth at least Rs 250 crore annually over the past five years, and have handled or prepared consultancy reports for a minimum of five projects, will be eligible to participate.

"The selected consultancy firm will study parameters such as rainfall patterns, topography, availability of power, water supply, sewerage and waste management infrastructure, surrounding population, regional development, and noise pollution likely to arise from airport operations at all three identified locations," he said.

The feasibility report must also include details of the estimated cost, the land required, and approvals to be obtained from various authorities.

Based on a comprehensive assessment of all three locations, the firm will submit its recommendation on the most suitable site for the second airport, he explained. *—PTI*

DKS will become CM on 6 Jan: Cong MLA

RAMANAGARA, 13 DEC

Congress MLA HA Iqbal Hussain predicted that Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar will become the Chief Minister on 6 January.

"There is a 99 per cent chance that he would become the chief minister on 6 January," Hussain, who is a supporter of Shivakumar, said on Saturday.

When asked about the date's significance he said, "I don't know. Everybody is saying this. It can either be January 6 or 9."

Hussain demanded on Friday that Shivakumar should be made the chief minister.

SOMANNA BACKS DR G

Meanwhile, Union Minister of State for Railways, V. Somanna said that he wants Home Minister G. Parameshwara to become the Chief Minister.

"Getting power is luck. I never thought that Parameshwara would remain just a Home minister. We want to see him as the Chief Minister. Not just me, the people of Tumakuru want to see him as the Chief Minister," Somanna said in Tumakuru.

When someone from the audience asked about DK Shivakumar, he said, "What Shivakumar wants to become depends on his luck. Character is bigger than luck." *— PTI*

Crocodile sneaks into residential area in Dandeli, rescued

DANDELI, 13 DEC

Residents of Dandeli successfully captured a mugger crocodile that had wandered into a residential area, releasing it safely back into the Kali River near Gate No. 3 on Haliyal Road.

Eyewitnesses reported that the crocodile, believed to have emerged from the Kali River via drainage channels, was seen moving through the locality, stirring panic among the community. While crocodile sightings along the river are not uncommon, their venture into inhabited areas is considered rare.

The Forest Department was notified; however, locals decided to take matters into their own hands due to delays in official response. In a united effort, residents covered the crocodile's head with a gunny sack to restrain it, tied a rope around its snout, and carefully dragged it back to the riverbank.

The animal was released unharmed into the water.

Dandeli, situated in the Western Ghats and part of the Kali Tiger Reserve, is renowned for its vibrant wildlife. The Kali River is home to a significant population of mugger crocodiles (Crocodylus palustris), making human-crocodile interactions an ongoing concern in riverside communities. *—Salar News*

COPS SHOCKED BY SCALE

Raichur youth booked in 32 cases of child pornography

RAICHUR, 13 DEC

A youth belonging to a reputed family in Raichur district has been booked in 32 cases, including nine cases under the CSAM (Child Sexual Abuse Material) law, for allegedly watching obscene videos.

Police were shocked after discovering the youth's "sexual obsession," as he was constantly watching obscene videos.

During an investigation by cyber officials, the illegal activities of this youth came to light.

When the email ID and mobile phone number linked to the website were examined, the youth's actions came to the attention of authorities.

After watching obscene videos, the youth used to delete browsing history on his mobile phone. However, the videos he watched were recorded on the website's server. After checking the evidence, the police registered cases against him.

Uploading, sharing and viewing images and videos involving the sexual exploitation of children is illegal as per CSAM.

As per CSAM, in case of a first offence, imprisonment of up to five years and a fine of up to Rs 10 lakh may be imposed. If a subsequent offence is proved, the law mandates up to seven years jail and a fine of up to Rs 10 lakh. *—Salar News*

- Police were shocked after discovering the Raichur youth's "obsession," as he was constantly watching obscene videos. Although he deleted his browser history, police still recovered evidence

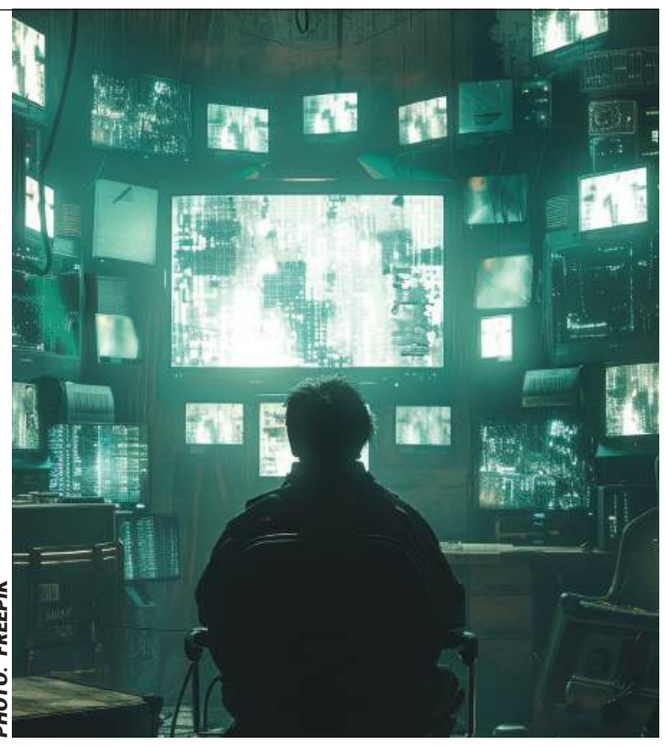

PHOTO: FREEPIK

PHOTO: ANI

Shivraj Patil's last rites held with state honours

LATUR, 13 DEC

The last rites of the former union minister Shivraj Patil, who passed away on Friday in Latur, were performed with full state honours in his home district of Latur, Maharashtra, on Saturday. Top leaders attended the ceremony, including Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, Union Minister Sanjay Seth, former Maharashtra CM Ashok Chavan, and Karnataka Minister Eshwar Khandre. The prominent Lingayat community member was buried at his farm, six kilometres from Latur, in a seated, meditative posture, in accordance with Lingayat tradition. Birla laid a wreath on Patil's remains, paying tribute to his half-century-long political career, including roles as Lok Sabha Speaker and in various Union Ministries. *—PTI*

Kerala polls: Boost for UDF, LDF faces defeat

LDF met with huge setback as the party lost control of 4 out of 5 municipal corporations

T'PURAM, 13 DEC

In a morale-boosting show ahead of the 2026 Assembly polls, Congress-led UDF on Saturday secured a decisive victory in Kerala's local body elections, dealing a blow to the LDF.

The UDF's campaign, which focused on a range of issues, including the politically sensitive Sabarimala gold missing case, seems to have resonated with voters across urban and rural landscapes.

The coalition won control of a majority of municipal corporations, municipalities, block panchayats, and gram panchayats, marking a clear shift in local governance.

The final results of the local body polls, which were held in two phases in the state earlier this week, came as a huge setback for the LDF, which lost control of four out of the five municipal corporations where it was in power.

These included the Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam Corporations, where the Left ruled for 45 and 25 continuous years, respectively.

The Left lost the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation to the BJP-led NDA, and the Kollam Corporation to the UDF, which has the highest number of seats there but is two short of a majority.

This year, the UDF also won 54 of the 87 municipalities, 4 of the 6 corporations, and was significantly ahead in the village, block, and district panchayat segments.

In the 2020 civic polls, it had won a total of 7757 wards in the grama, block, district panchayats, municipality and corporation put together.

This time it holds a commanding lead in the three-tier panchayat system, leading in 8,020 of the 17,337 grama panchayat wards, 1,241 of the 2,267 block panchayat wards, and 195 of the 346 district panchayat wards. On the other hand, the LDF suffered significant losses at all levels, as compared to its performance in the 2020 civic polls. The outcome will force it to rethink its strategy ahead of the upcoming state assembly elections.

Left veteran and Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan conceded that the LDF did not achieve the expected results. *—PTI*

Congress supporters celebrate outside a polling center during the counting of votes after the party won 54 of the 87 municipalities in Kerala's local body elections, in Thiruvananthapuram, on Saturday *PHOTO: PTI*

> **The LDF's 'communal politics' led to its defeat ... They followed minority communalism till the parliamentary elections and later shifted to majority communalism**
>
>
>
> -VD Satheesan, LoP in Kerala Assembly

> **Thank you Thiruvananthapuram! The mandate the BJP-NDA got in the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation is a watershed moment in Kerala's politics**
>
>
>
> -Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

> **In 2026, many 'Red Fortresses' will collapse, the UDF flag will fly high - and Kerala will continue its tradition of firmly rejecting the BJP's divisive, polarising politics that seek to weaken our unity and social harmony**
>
>
>
> -KC Venugopal, AICC General Secretary

Cong candidate who approached HC wins in T'puram

The Congress candidate who contested from the Muttada division of the Thiruva nanthapuram Corporation in the local body polls, and had to move the Kerala High Court to reinstate her name in the voters' list, won by around 300 votes on Saturday.

Vyshna had approached the HC after getting a notice from the State Election Commission (SEC) stating that her name had been removed from the voters' list. *—PTI*

Bihar CM allocates portfolios of newly formed depts

PATNA, 13 DEC

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has allocated the portfolios of three newly established departments, retaining the Civil Aviation portfolio for himself, as per an official notification released on 12 December. The Bihar cabinet approved the creation of the Youth, Employment and Skill Development Department, Higher Education Department, and Civil Aviation Department on 9 December, while also renaming three existing departments. The Animal and Fisheries Resource Department has now become the Dairy, Fisheries and Animal Resources Department, and the Labour Resources Department is now the Labour Resources and Migrant Workers Welfare Department. *—PTI*

Cong flays BJP on India being left out US' 'Pax Silica'

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

The Congress party has expressed concern over India's exclusion from the US-led 'Pax Silica' initiative aimed at establishing a secure silicon supply chain, attributing the setback to the deteriorating relationship between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and former US President Donald Trump.

Congress general secretary **Jairam Ramesh** remarked that it is "not very surprising" given the "sharp downturn" in ties since May 2025, adding, "Undoubtedly, it would have been to our advantage if we had been part of this group."

The initiative includes nations like Japan, South Korea, and Australia—yet excludes India, a notable omission, especially as it aligns with a broader strategic effort to reduce Chinese influence on high-tech supply chains.

CONGRESS FLAYS MODI GOVT FOR MGNREGA NAME CHANGE

In a separate issue, the Congress has slammed the Modi government's decision to rename the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) to 'Poojya Bapu Grameen Rozgar Yojna.'

Ramesh questioned the need for the change, stating, "They hate Pandit Nehru but it seems they also hate Mahatma Gandhi. What's wrong with the name Mahatma Gandhi?"

He accused the government of being "masters" at renaming schemes to repackage their failures, citing past changes like the rebranding of Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan to Swachh Bharat.

KC Venugopal further alleged that the renaming is a superficial tactic to mask the government's neglect of the scheme, which is crucial for rural livelihoods.

"In reality, this government has no intent of delivering welfare," he asserted.

MGNREGA, enacted in 2005, guarantees 100 days of wage employment to rural households annually. *—PTI*

- MGNREGA, enacted in 2005, guarantees 100 days of wage employment to rural households annually.

Cong to rally at Ramlila Maidan over 'vote theft'

The Congress will intensify its campaign against alleged electoral fraud with a rally at Ramlila Maidan on Sunday, aiming to hold the government and the Election Commission accountable. President Mallikarjun Kharge and former leader Rahul Gandhi will address the gathering, alongside key figures like Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Sonia Gandhi. Congress general secretary KC Venugopal stated they have gathered 5.5 crore signatures. *—PTI*

Manipur MLAs travel to Delhi amid political issues

IMPHAL, 13 DEC

Ten BJP MLAs from Manipur, including former chief minister **N Biren Singh** and Speaker Thokchom Satyabrata Singh, travelled to Delhi on Saturday to meet the party's central leadership.

The meeting is expected to discuss the formation of a new state government. Manipur has been under President's Rule since February, following Singh's resignation amid criticism of his handling of ethnic violence that erupted in May 2023.

Speaking before the meeting, N Biren Singh expressed hope that a "positive decision" would be taken for the benefit of the state. Other MLAs, including Kh Joykishan Singh and RK Imo Singh, said the purpose of the meeting

appeared to be government formation, but details remained unclear.

The BJP currently holds 37 of the 60 seats in the state assembly.

Meanwhile, petrol pumps across the Imphal Valley shut down on Saturday in protest against extortion demands.

The action followed the discovery of a hand grenade near a pump in Koirengei, Imphal West, which was reportedly placed as a threat over unpaid extortion. *—PTI*

COPS SUSPECT FOUL PLAY

Sandeshkhali case: 1 held in witness' son's death

KOLKATA, 13 DEC

The police have arrested an individual in connection with a dangerous road incident that left a key witness injured and resulted in the death of his son. The arrest occurred in the early hours on Saturday in Sarberia, South 24 Parganas district.

The evidence indicated the arrested suspect's involvement in the accident that occurred on Wednesday on the Basanti Highway near Boyramari petrol pump. Bholanath Ghosh, the witness, sustained injuries, while his younger son Satyajit, 32 and their driver Sahanur Molla, 27 were tragically killed when a truck collided with their vehicle, dragging it and depositing it into a nearby waterbody.

The accused, **Sheikh Shahjahan**, a suspended

Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader from Sandeshkhali, faces multiple allegations, including sexual abuse and land grabbing, and was arrested in February 2024 after evading capture for 55 days.

He had previously encountered police in relation to cases involving assaults on Enforcement Directorate officers during a raid linked to a ration scam. *—PTI*

Land deal row: Ajit says officials responsible for faulty registrations

NAGPUR, 13 DEC

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar stated on Saturday that officials responsible for registering documents should have refused to process agreements that were unlawful and clearly informed the parties concerned. His remarks follow a notice issued by the deputy registrar to his son Parth Pawar's firm, Amadea Enterprises LLP, seeking Rs 21 crore in stamp duty and penalties over a controversial Pune land deal.

The 40-acre plot in Pune's upscale Mundhwa area, bought for Rs 300 crore, belongs to the government and could not legally be sold. A committee led by the Joint Inspector General of Registration indicted Parth Pawar's business partner Digvijay Patil, Sheetal Tejwani, and sub-registrar Ravindra Taru. Parth Pawar was not named in the FIR as his name did not appear on official documents.

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari, Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis and DyCM Ajit Pawar *PHOTO: X/@AJITPAWAR*

Critics, including Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut, questioned whether officials would dare challenge proposals from Ajit Pawar's son. The Bombay High Court has raised concerns about the police investigation, suggesting authorities may be shielding Parth. Ajit Pawar defended a legislative amendment allowing the revenue minister to hear contentious cases, stressing that the fault lay with registering authorities. *—PTI*

Operation Sindoor still on, says CDS Anil Chauhan

HYDERABAD, 13 DEC

The Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), General Anil Chauhan, said the intensity of operations may have ebbed, but Operation Sindoor is still on.

General Chauhan, who reviewed the Combined Graduation Parade (CGP) of the 216th course at the Air Force Academy here on Saturday, said wars are not won by rhetoric but by action.

The CDS told the new officers that they were entering the Indian Air Force (IAF) during a total transformation of the armed forces, joint operations and pursuit of 'atmanirbharta.'

The CDS conferred the 'President's Commission' on the new officers. 'Wings' and 'Brevets' were presented to the Flying Officers, Indian Navy officers, Coast Guard and trainees from Vietnam. *—PTI*

'Maharashtra govt unhappy with IIT Bombay's name'

NAGPUR, 13 DEC

The Maharashtra state government is "not happy" with Union Minister Jitendra Singh's approval of retaining the name IIT Bombay instead of renaming it IIT Mumbai, Maharashtra Minister for Cultural Affairs Ashish Shelar stated. The state government has written to the Centre expressing its view on the matter. Shelar was responding to a query regarding the government's stance on Singh's remarks: "As far as IIT Bombay is concerned, thank God it still is this name. You have not changed it to Mumbai. And also true for Madras. It remains IIT Madras." Shelar reiterated that, "The Maharashtra government's stand is very clear that it is not 'Bombay' but 'Mumbai'. The government is not happy with that particular statement." *—PTI*

Navjot Kaur requests CM Mann to provide security

CHANDIGARH, 13 DEC

Navjot Kaur Sidhu is requesting security from Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann, whom she accuses of protecting criminal interests and ignoring her corruption allegations. Sidhu was recently supended from Congress following her "Rs 500 crore for chief minister's chair" remarks that sparked a political row. In a post on X on Friday night, she said, "CM Bhagwant Mann ji, I think I need some security now, or else you will be responsible... Why is there no response from your side on the issues I raised before the Honourable Governor of Punjab? Why are you facilitating the liquor and mining mafia?" She also shared a copy of a memorandum whrein she alleged a "land scandal" under the Bhagwant Mann government. *—PTI*

M'rashtra ISIS operative smuggled Khair wood: ED

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

An alleged ISIS module operating from Padgha village in Thane district, Maharashtra, has been found involved in the illegal felling and smuggling of Khair wood from local reserve forests, according to an Enforcement Directorate (ED) probe linked to terror financing.

Raids were conducted on 11 December in Padgha and Borivali, as well as locations in Delhi, Kolkata, Hazaribag (Jharkhand) and Prayagraj (Uttar Pradesh). The ED seized Rs 3.70 crore in cash and gold and bullion worth Rs 6 crore. Financial analysis revealed that individuals linked to the Padgha module were supplying wood to companies producing Kattha, used in paan and Ayurvedic medicines.

The NIA, which filed the case in November 2023, alleged the module, led by the late Saquib Nachan, engaged in recruitment, radicalisation, weapon and IED procurement, and raising funds. *—PTI*

'IRRESPONSIBLE STRATEGY'

3 US lawmakers move to end Trump's 50% tariffs on India

NEW YORK/ WASHINGTON, 13 DEC

Three US lawmakers have introduced a resolution in Congress aimed at scrapping the tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump on India, that saying the "irresponsible tariff strategy" towards India is counterproductive and that it "weakens an important partnership."

Representatives Deborah Ross of North Carolina, Marc Veasey of Texas and Raja Krishnamoorthi of Illinois introduced the resolution on Friday in the House of Representatives to terminate Trump's national emergency authorising of tariffs of up to 50 per cent on imports from India.

The resolution would end the emergency that Trump invoked to impose tariffs on Indian goods under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) and rescind the additional 25 per cent "secondary" duties that took effect on 27 August on top of earlier reciprocal tariffs.

US President Donald Trump *PHOTO: PTI*

Together, these measures raised duties on many Indian-origin products to 50 per cent, Ross said.

"Instead of advancing American interests, these duties disrupt supply chains, harm American workers, and drive up costs. Ending these damaging tariffs will allow the US to engage with India to advance our shared economic and security needs," lawmaker Krishnamoorthi said. *—PTI*

Pankaj Chaudhary sole candidate for UP BJP Chief

LUCKNOW, 13 DEC

Union Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary on Saturday filed his nomination papers for the post of the Uttar Pradesh BJP chief, and was the only candidate to do so, party sources said.

A party officebearer confirmed the development and told PTI that this paves the way for him to get elected unopposed.

Chaudhary submitted the papers to former Union minister and BJP state election officer Mahendra Nath Pandey and central election observer Vinod Tawde.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Deputy Chief Ministers Keshav Prasad Maurya and Brajesh Pathak and Jal Shakti Minister Swatantra Dev Singh were also present.

Chaudhary said on X, "Upon arriving, I received a warm welcome from the dedicated party workers. I express my heartfelt gratitude to all the workers for the affection and respect they showed me."

Pandey said on Friday that the next state president of the party would be announced on Sunday by the central election officer and Union Minister Piyush Goyal. *—PTI*

Gulmarg gets Asia's longest ski drag lift

SRINAGAR, 13 DEC

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Saturday threw open Asia's longest ski drag lift at the famous skiing resort of Gulmarg, officials said. He also inaugurated the world's highest revolving multi-purpose hall at the Affarwat area in the resort, which also houses a restaurant, they said. Abdullah said the ski drag lift at Kongdori in Gulmarg, in north Kashmir's Baramulla district, will significantly enhance skiing infrastructure in the resort and strengthen its standing on the international winter sports map. "This landmark addition will significantly enhance skiing infrastructure and further strengthen Gulmarg's standing on the international winter sports map," the J&K chief minister's office said. *—PTI*

IndiGo flight suffers tail strike at Ranchi

RANCHI, 13 DEC

An IndiGo flight operating the Bhubaneswar-Ranchi route suffered a tail strike while landing at Ranchi airport on Friday evening, officials said. The incident occurred around 7.30pm with around 70 passengers on board, who experienced a sudden jolt when the aircraft's tail touched the runway. No injuries were reported. Ranchi airport director Vinod Kumar said the aircraft was grounded after being found technically unfit for further operations. As a result, the return flight to Bhubaneswar was cancelled. Some passengers cancelled or rescheduled their journeys, while others were transported to Bhubaneswar by road. *—PTI*

Homes of 8 drug peddlers razed in Jammu

JAMMU, 13 DEC

The Jammu district administration on Saturday demolished eight illegal structures, including houses belonging to alleged drug peddlers, during a major anti-narcotics drive at Narwal Bala village in Bahu tehsil. The action was carried out on the directions of District Magistrate Rakesh Minhas in coordination with SSP Jammu Joginder Singh. Officials said the structures belonged to peddlers involved in multiple cases under the NDPS Act and were razed after they failed to desist from illegal activities despite repeated warnings.In a separate incident, police arrested a drug peddler in Kathua district and recovered 6.64 grams of heroin from his possession during vehicle checking in the Nagri area. The accused, Parvinder Singh, was travelling on a motorcycle, which was also seized. A case under the NDPS Act has been registered.*—PTI*

Rising material costs push kite prices up by 40%

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, 13 DEC

A steep rise in raw material costs has led to an almost 40 per cent increase in kite prices this year, affecting manufacturers ahead of the Makar Sankranti festival. The minimum price of a kite has risen from Rs 5 last year to Rs 7, manufacturers said. The Rajput family of Buddi Lane, engaged in kite making for over 60 years and supplying across Maharashtra and neighbouring states, is witnessing the impact firsthand. With production in full swing, Anil Rajput said input costs have surged, with paper rims rising from Rs 900 to Rs 1,100 and 1,000 bamboo sticks nearly doubling to around Rs 2,000. He said higher costs have made it difficult to justify price hikes to customers and raised concerns over the future of the traditional, labour-intensive craft, as younger generations are reluctant to continue.*—PTI*

Footballer Lionel Messi was surrounded by VIPs as soon as he entered the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan (VYBK) in Kolkata. Chairs were later vandalised amid crowd unrest. Earlier in the day, Messi inaugurated his 70-foot statue and met Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan ***PHOTO: PTI***

We came to see Messi, not politicians: Fans

A player claims Messi was unhappy with the arrangements; SRK, Ganguly forced to leave early

>>>**Continued from Page 1**

Former India international Lalkamal Bhowmick, who was part of the Diamond Harbour All Stars team, said Messi himself appeared unhappy. "Messi looked happy initially as he met players. Later, I heard him saying to his team, 'Since I came inside, I am only walking this side and that side. What is happening?'," Bhowmick told Livemint.

Another former international, Dipendu Biswas, said he had suggested that Messi, Suárez and De Paul be taken around the stadium in an open jeep. "This was a fan's event. People came by spending thousands of rupees," he said.

"This was complete mismanagement," said Ajay Shah, who attended the event with his son. "People have spent a month's salary to see Messi. We came to watch him, not politicians."

Ticket prices ranged from Rs 4,500 to Rs 10,000, with many fans arriving early in the morning in hopes of seeing the football legend up close. The disorder forced the programme to be curtailed, with several dignitaries, including Shah Rukh Khan, Sourav Ganguly and Mamata Banerjee, unable to participate as planned.

"Only leaders and actors were surrounding Messi... Why did they call us then... We have got a ticket for 12,000 rupees, but we were not even able to see his face", a fan at the stadium told Indian news agency ANI.

One angry fan told the Press Trust of India news agency people had paid the equivalent of a month's salary to see the eight-time Ballon d'Or winner.

A man lies amid broken chairs at the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan in Kolkata. Later in the evening, Messi played a friendly match against Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy in Hyderabad ***PHOTO: PTI***

"I paid Rs 5,000 for the ticket and came with my son to watch Messi, not politicians.

"The police and military personnel were taking selfies, and the management is to blame."

The All India Football Federation (AIFF) said it was not involved in the "private event".

Hours later, Banerjee expressed shock and announced a high-level inquiry. In a post on X, she apologised to Messi and football lovers, saying she was "deeply disturbed" by the mismanagement.

The inquiry committee will be headed by retired Calcutta High Court judge Justice Ashim Kumar Ray, with senior state officials as members, to fix responsibility and recommend preventive measures.

For a city renowned for its footballing culture, scenes of broken chairs, ripped banners and angry fans stood in stark contrast to the promise of the day, as a long-awaited Messi appearance ended in disorder at one of India's largest football arenas. *—PTI*

Schools go hybrid, 50% WFH in offices as Delhi chokes

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

Delhi on Saturday enforced the strictest pollution-control measures under Stage IV of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) as air quality deteriorated sharply due to unfavourable weather conditions. The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) ordered all government and private schools to conduct classes up to Class XI (excluding Class X) in hybrid mode, allowing both physical and online attendance.

In addition, 50 per cent of staff in government and private offices have been directed to work from home. A similar work-from-home order issued on November 24 under GRAP Stage III was later withdrawn after air quality briefly improved.

The GRAP Sub-Committee initially invoked Stage III across the National Capital Region (NCR) earlier in the day. However, following a further spike in pollution levels, it held an urgent meeting at 6.30 pm to review data and forecasts from the India Meteorological Department and the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology.

A man walks along a smog-covered road on a winter morning, in New Delhi ***PHOTO: PTI***

Delhi's Air Quality Index (AQI) stood at 401 at 10 am, placing it in the "severe" category, and continued to rise through the day, reaching 431 at 4 pm, 436 at 5 pm, 441 at 6 pm and 448 by 7 pm. Officials cited very low wind speeds, a stable atmosphere and mist or haze at night as factors preventing the dispersion of pollutants.

Stage IV brings the toughest curbs, including a complete ban on construction and demolition activities across Delhi-NCR, even for linear public projects such as highways, flyovers, pipelines and power transmission lines. The entry of trucks into Delhi has been prohibited, except for those carrying essential goods or operating on CNG, LNG, electric or BS-VI diesel. *—PTI*

2 nightclubs in Goa sealed for alleged violation of norms

PANAJI, 13 DEC

Authorities have sealed at least two nightclubs as part of a statewide crackdown following a devastating fire at the Birch by Romeo Lane nightclub on 6 December, which claimed the lives of 25 people. In response to the tragedy, the Goa government has announced stringent new safety measures for all tourist and entertainment establishments.

In light of the new norms, Cafe CO2 Goa, a prominent nightclub located on a cliff overlooking the Arabian Sea at Vagator beach in North Goa, was sealed on Saturday. The move came two days after Goya Club, also in Vagator, was shut down for alleged violations. An inspection of Cafe CO2 Goa at Ozrant Cliff by a state government-appointed team revealed that the club, which has a seating capacity of 250, did not possess a no-objection certificate (NOC) from the Fire and Emergency Services Department.

Chief Minister Pramod Sawant has warned of licence cancellation and sealing for establishments violating stricter fire safety norms being enforced ahead of the Christmas and New Year season, including mandatory fire safety clearances, a complete ban on fireworks and pyrotechnics, occupancy limits, and restrictions on liquor sales after 11 pm across Goa.

Police investigating the Birch by Romeo Lane fire tragedy have arrested six people so far, including managers and staff members of the nightclub. The owners of the fire-ravaged establishment, Saurabh Luthra and his brother Gaurav Luthra, have been detained in Phuket, Thailand. Authorities there have initiated deportation proceedings, government sources said on Friday. *—PTI*

She earns: HC sets aside order on maintenance

PRAYAGRAJ, 13 DEC

The Allahabad High Court has set aside a lower court order directing Ankit Saha to pay maintenance to his estranged wife, observing that she is an "earning lady", capable of maintaining herself, and had not disclosed her true income in her affidavit.

The court observed that the woman is a post-graduate, professionally qualified as a web designer, and gainfully employed, earning between Rs 34,000 and Rs 36,000 per month—an income it did not consider meagre given that she has no other liabilities. In contrast, the husband was noted to have the responsibility of maintaining his aged parents and other obligations, leading the court to hold that she was not entitled to maintenance.

Overruling the 17 February order passed by the family court, the High Court set aside the woman's claim for maintenance after the husband's counsel alleged that she had made false statements in her affidavit by projecting herself as illiterate and unemployed, and disclosed her actual income only during cross-examination. Agreeing with the submission, the court said in its order, "Cases of those litigants who have no regard for the truth and those who indulge in suppressing material facts need to be thrown out of the court." *—PTI*

Ex-IAF officers arrested for alleged Pak links in Assam

TEZPUR, 13 DEC

Retired Indian Air Force personnel have been arrested in Assam's Sonitpur district for allegedly having links with Pakistani intelligence operatives, police said on Saturday. Additional Superintendent of Police Haricharan Bhumij stated that preliminary investigations indicate the accused shared sensitive documents and information with Pakistani operatives via social media platforms. Police have seized his laptop and mobile phone, which have been sent for forensic examination.

Although some data was found to be deleted, investigators are analysing the devices. A case has been registered against the accused under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). *—PTI*

CJI calls for 'unified judicial policy'

JAISALMER, 13 DEC

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant called for a 'unified judicial policy' at the West Zone Regional Conference, emphasising the role of technology in standardising practices across the judiciary to ensure a "seamless experience" for citizens nationwide.

Kant pointed out that the federal structure has led to a divergence in High Court practices and technological capabilities, resulting in "uneven experiences" for litigants.

"Predictability is crucial for building trust in the judicial system," he stated, asserting that technology can identify systemic delays and enhance efficiency.

He argued for the implementation of data-driven tools to expedite urgent cases, highlighting recent administrative orders ensuring prompt listing of critical matters. "Where delay causes deep harm, the system must respond with urgency," he noted.

Additionally, Kant raised concerns over complex legal language in judicial decisions, advocating for clearer communication of verdicts. "A unified judicial approach must extend to how we communicate outcomes," he asserted. *—PTI*

UP girl kidnapped, raped for 25 days

BALLIA, 13 DEC

A 21-year-old man has been arrested for allegedly kidnapping a 17-year-old girl and raping her repeatedly after taking her to Mumbai and Pune, police said on Saturday.

The accused, identified as Baburam, allegedly abducted the minor on 14 November

Acting on a complaint filed by the girl's father, police registered a case and launched a search operation.

The victim was later rescued from an area under Chitbaragaon police station. She told officers that the accused had taken her to Mumbai and Pune in Maharashtra, where he sexually assaulted her multiple times over a period of around 25 days.

Based on her statement, police added charges of rape *—PTI*

IN ASSAULT CASE

TN cops break open door, arrest YouTuber 'Savukku' after standoff

CHENNAI, 13 DEC

YouTuber and political commentator 'Savukku' Shankar was arrested from his residence here on Saturday in connection with an alleged assault and extortion case filed by a film producer, police said.

According to officials, Shankar initially refused to open the door when police arrived to arrest him, insisting they speak to his advocates first. A video that went viral showed police officers saying they were ready to share arrest details and produce the warrant if sought in a proper manner, adding that law enforcement should not be obstructed in discharging duties.

Five members of Shankar's team were also arrested. Later visuals showed police entering the house by breaking open the front door with the help of fire and rescue service personnel, while Shankar was seen seated calmly inside.

Hours before his arrest, Shankar posted a video claiming the case was "false" and politically motivated. He said police had issued summons in October, which he responded to by denying allegations that the producer had visited his office or that money was demanded to remove a video. Police, he claimed, falsely alleged that he and his team assaulted the producer, snatched Rs 2 lakh and demanded more money to delete content.

Shankar further alleged harassment at the behest of a senior police official and accused the state government of targeting him to cripple Savukku Media ahead of the Assembly elections. He also claimed police seized his modem and mobile phone during the operation. *—PTI*

Rajasthan baby dies after ambulance runs out of oxygen

JAIPUR, 13 DEC

A one-day-old infant died in an ambulance while being transported to a government hospital in Jaipur, with the child's father claiming that the oxygen cylinder ran out and they were "abandoned" by the driver at another medical facility.

The incident occurred on Friday evening near Bassi here, when the infant, who had been struggling to breathe, was referred from Bharatpur district's Bayana hospital to SMS hospital, and his father and uncle were taking him in a private ambulance, SHO Bassi police station, Dharmendra Kumar said.

According to the father, the ambulance driver abandoned them at the Bassi government hospital after the child's oxygen supply was depleted, the SHO said.

"Near Banskho, the father noticed that the cylinder had run out of oxygen, following which the ambulance driver went to nearby Bassi hospital, where doctors declared the child dead. There was no nursing staff in the ambulance and the oxygen cylinder was being operated by the father," the SHO said. The father left for Bharatpur with the child's body. No complaint was filed, he said. *—PTI*

DELHI'S FOAM OF SHAME

A thick layer of toxic foam resurfaced on the Yamuna at Kalindi Kunj in New Delhi, underscoring the capital's recurring air and water pollution crisis. Boatmen deployed by authorities were seen moving vessels upstream and downstream to increase water circulation and push the froth further away, while officials routinely sprayed chemicals to break it down. Despite these measures, the persistent foam points to worsening water quality ***PHOTO: PTI***

Mandir-masjid takes centre stage ahead of Bengal polls

Posters showing the Babri Masjid, demolished in 1992, put up in Murshidabad ***PHOTO: SCREENGRAB***

As West Bengal heads into an election year, a spate of temple–mosque announcements, scripture spectacles and date-sensitive symbolism is pushing the state's politics into unfamiliar territory, sharpening communal polarisation in a borderland shaped by partition memories, demographic anxieties, and a coexistence periodically tested by political mobilisation.

From bordering Murshidabad district to the planned township of Salt Lake, on the eastern fringes of Kolkata, faith has emerged as the most audible idiom of political mobilisation, often drowning out conversations on migration, jobs, prices and governance, as rival players test how far religious assertion can stretch Bengal's electoral grammar ahead of the assembly polls.

The immediate spark came on 6 December, which marks the anniversary of the Babri Masjid demolition.

Suspended TMC MLA Humayun Kabir pressed ahead with laying the foundation stone of a mosque "modelled on the original Babri structure" in Murshidabad's Rejinagar, under unprecedented security cover.

Kabir argued that the political moment itself had shifted.

"People are trying to pretend that faith has no place in Bengal's politics. That phase is over. Whether one likes it or not, questions of identity, dignity and religious rights will shape the next election. The next elections will be fought on questions of honour and belonging. Anyone denying that is not reading the ground," Kabir told PTI.

In nearby Banjatiya in Murshidabad, BJP leaders also conducted groundwork rituals for a Ram temple, framing it as resistance to what they called minority appeasement. Elsewhere, the saffron party sharpened its pitch around cultural assertion, while the TMC moved quickly to distance itself from Kabir's actions.

"Bengal's culture has never supported competitive religious politics. The party believes faith is personal and politics must remain inclusive. We will not allow Bengal to be converted into a laboratory for polarisation experiments borrowed from elsewhere," TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh said.

The response underlined the party's political tightrope - managing a minority base that accounts for nearly 30 per cent of the electorate, while arresting signs of Hindu drift amid intensifying identity politics.

On 7 December, Kolkata's Brigade Parade Grounds, the most politically loaded public stage, hosted a massive Bhagavad Gita recital projected as "five lakh voices chanting together".

Senior BJP leaders and nationally known monks filled the dais, even as organisers insisted the event was spiritual rather than political.

Kabir was quick to announce a similar Quran recital event in Murshidabad district.

Political scientist Maidul Islam said this is a very new phenomenon in Bengal politics. "Leaders like Humayun Kabir and parties, like the BJP and AIMIM, are consciously trying to import Hindi heartland narratives into Bengal. Dates, symbols and mass religious performances - these are not accidental," he told PTI.

BJP state president Samik Bhattacharya said that when one side uses religious symbolism to consolidate its vote bank, the "other cannot be expected to remain silent".

"The politics of selective secularism will no longer work in Bengal. For decades, Hindu sentiments were pushed to the margins of the state's political discourse. This is about to change," he claimed.

For decades, Bengal's political mobilisation rested largely on class, language and welfare, with religion operating as a secondary identity marker.

Even during earlier communal flare-ups, mainstream parties avoided sustained, competitive religious symbolism.

However, Murshidabad, where Muslims form a numerical majority and memories of Partition displacement remain alive, has emerged as the epicentre with 'mandir-masjid' politics increasingly dominating public conversation.

In Salt Lake, posters appeared announcing an Ayodhya-style Ram temple complex with a hospital, school and old-age home.

The proposed foundation ceremony is slated for Ram Navami next year, signalling how religious symbolism is now being projected deep into spaces associated with governance and power.

"When temple-mosque politics moves from border districts to planned urban centres, it signals ambition, not spontaneity," political analyst Biswanath Chakraborty said, adding that it reflects an "attempt to normalise religious assertion as mainstream electoral language".

The Congress and the Left, reduced to the margins in Bengal, have warned of historical repetition. "We know where competitive communalism leads," state Congress chief Subhankar Sarkar said, recalling the countrywide violence that followed the Babri demolition in the 1990s.

Bengal is a border state born of Partition, its social fabric shaped by refugee influx, demographic churn and episodic violence.

While it never fully followed the Hindi heartland's template of sustained religious polarisation, the scars remain real and politically exploitable.

"When economic distress dominates daily life, sudden 'mandir–masjid' politics signals a deliberate narrative shift," political scientist Subhomoy Moitra said. *—PTI*

SALAR ساہر

Thai villagers stay back to guard homes amid clashes

Fighting that has flared along the Thai-Cambodian border has sent hundreds of thousands of Thai villagers fleeing from their homes close to the frontier since Monday. Their once-bustling communities have fallen largely silent except for the distant rumble of firing across the fields.

Yet in several of these villages, where normally a few hundred people live, a few dozen residents have chosen to stay behind despite the constant sounds of danger.

In a village in Buriram province, about 10 km from the border, Somjai Kraiprakon and roughly 20 of her neighbours gathered around a roadside house, keeping watch over nearby homes. Appointed by the local administration as Village Security Volunteers, they guarded the empty homes after many residents were forced to flee and with fewer security officials stationed nearby than usual.

The latest large-scale fighting derailed a ceasefire pushed by US President Donald Trump, which halted five days of clashes in July triggered by longstanding territorial disputes. As of Saturday, around two dozen people had been reported killed in the renewed violence.

At a house on the village's main intersection, now a meeting point, kitchen and sleeping area, explosions were a regular backdrop, with the constant risk of stray ammunition landing nearby. Somjai rarely flinched, but when the blasts came too close, she would sprint to a makeshift bunker beside the house, built on an empty plot from large precast concrete drainage pipes reinforced with dirt, sandbags and car tires. She volunteered shortly after the July fighting. The 52-year-old completed a three-day training course with the district administration that included gun training and patrol techniques before she was appointed in November. The volunteer village guards are permitted to carry firearms provided by relevant authorities.

The army has emphasized the importance of volunteers like Somjai in this new phase of fighting, saying they help "provide the highest possible confidence and safety for the public."

According to the army, volunteers "conduct patrols, establish checkpoints, stand guard inside villages, protect the property of local people, and monitor suspicious individuals who may attempt to infiltrate the area to gather intelligence."

Somjai said the volunteer team performs all these duties, keeping close watch on strangers and patrolling at night to discourage thieves from entering abandoned homes. Her main responsibility, however, is not monitoring threats but caring for about 70 dogs left behind in the community.

"This is my priority. The other things I let the men take care of them. I'm not good at going out patrolling at night. Fortunately I'm good with dogs," she said, adding that she first fed a few using her own money, but as donations began coming in, she was able to expand her feeding efforts.

In a nearby village, chief Praden Prajuabsook sat with about a dozen members of his village security team along a roadside in front of a local school. Around there, most shops were already closed and few cars could be seen passing once in a while.

Wearing navy blue uniforms and striped purple and blue scarves, the men and women chatted casually while keeping shotguns close and watching strangers carefully. Praden said the team stationed at different spots during the day, then started patrolling when night fell.

He noted that their guard duty is around the clock, and it comes with no compensation and relies entirely on volunteers. "We do it with our own will, for the brothers and sisters in our village," he said.

Beyond guarding empty homes, Praden's team, like Somjai, also ensures pets, cattle and other animals are fed. During the day, some members ride motorbikes from house to house to feed pigs, chickens and dogs left behind by their owners.

Although his village is close to the battlegrounds, Praden said he is not afraid of the sounds of fighting.

"We want our people to be safe... we are willing to safeguard the village for the people who have evacuated," he said. *—PTI*

- Fighting that has flared along the Thai-Cambodian border has sent hundreds of thousands of Thai villagers fleeing from their homes close to the frontier since Monday. Their once-bustling communities have fallen largely silent except for the distant rumble of firing across the fields.

Children raise their hands to receive donations at a shelter in Banteay Meanchey provincial town, Cambodia after fleeing their homes due to fighting between Thailand and Cambodia ***PHOTO: PTI***

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Armed settlers, silent state: West Bank violence hits new high

Violence by Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank has sharply escalated since October 2023, with attacks becoming more organised, brutal and increasingly shielded by state institutions. What were once largely incidents of vandalism and property damage have evolved into kidnappings, prolonged abuse and, in some cases, alleged military complicity.

On 3 December, 2025, 18-year-old Palestinian Owais Hammam was reportedly abducted near his home in Khirbet Bani Harith by Jewish settlers. Media reports say he was beaten, humiliated and held for hours at a nearby settlement, with Israeli soldiers allegedly involved before his release the next morning. Hammam was hospitalised with multiple injuries and severe psychological trauma. His case is not isolated.

According to the United Nations, more than 3,200 Palestinians were forcibly displaced by settler violence and movement restrictions in the two years leading up to October 2025. The UN described October 2025 as the worst month for settler violence since it began recording incidents in 2006.

This surge, scholars argue, reflects a deeper transformation within Israel's state institutions. Rather than acting as neutral enforcers of law, the military, police and government bodies have become increasingly aligned with, and at times complicit in, settler violence against Palestinians. This is not merely a failure of enforcement, but the outcome of long-term political, social and cultural shifts that have reshaped Israeli society since the mid-1990s.

A SETTLERS' GOVT

The clearest expression of this shift is Israel's current government, formed in December 2022. For the first time, key ministries are led by figures with explicit pro-settler ideologies and personal ties to the most radical elements of the settlement movement.

Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, both settlers with extremist views, have implemented policies that directly embolden settler violence. Since October 2023, Ben-Gvir has loosened firearm regulations, issuing more than 100,000 new gun licences, with settlers receiving preferential access. Smotrich has distributed security equipment to illegal outposts and allocated substantial public funds to settler militias.

These measures have fostered a sense of impunity among settlers. At the same time, the government has pursued structural reforms that weaken institutional checks on settler expansion. The transfer of the Civil Administration, the Israeli body governing civilian affairs in the West Bank, from military command to Smotrich's Finance Ministry represents a profound shift.

The shaded areas show parts of the West Bank under nominal Palestinian control and joint Israeli-Palestinian control. Non-shaded areas in the West Bank are under Israeli control ***PHOTO: THE CONVERSATION***

For decades, the Civil Administration coordinated health, education and infrastructure services and served as a key channel of coordination with the Palestinian Authority under the Oslo Accords. Placing it under direct political control has eroded one of the few mechanisms capable of restraining settler activity.

Similarly, plans to place the West Bank Border Police under Ben-Gvir's Ministry of National Security threaten to dismantle the unified command structure that has helped manage tensions in the territory since 1967.

BLURRED LINES AND ARMED SETTLERS

Since 7 October, 2023, the distinction between settlers and security forces has further eroded. Israeli authorities have distributed around 8,000 army rifles to civilian settlement "defence squads" and regional battalions. These armed groups now operate alongside official forces and are often indistinguishable from them, wearing military uniforms and carrying army-issued weapons during attacks on Palestinians.

Police stations are frequently located inside settlements, reinforcing close relationships between law enforcement and settler communities. Many settlers also serve as army reservists, creating overlapping civilian and military identities.

Civilian security coordinators play an especially influential role. Tasked with liaising between the military and settlement defence squads, they help define settlement boundaries, restrict Palestinian movement and, in some cases, direct soldiers on the ground. As a result, soldiers often treat violent incidents as clashes between civilians rather than criminal acts. When tensions escalate, troops tend to defend settlers rather than protect Palestinian victims.

INSTITUTIONAL CAPTURE

These developments mirror broader societal changes. Once a marginal faction, the settler movement has become a dominant political force, with significant representation in government and military leadership. Settler priorities are now embedded in the operational logic of state institutions.

The consequences are evident in accountability figures. Between 2005 and 2023, more than 93 per cent of police investigations into settler violence were closed without indictment, and only 3 per cent led to convictions. In 2021, Israeli authorities opened just 87 investigations into "ideologically motivated offences", while UN monitors recorded 585 incidents. Senior police officials have dismissed reports of settler violence as fabrications by "radical left-wing anarchists".

Judicial oversight has also weakened. While Israel's Supreme Court recognises the West Bank as occupied territory under international law, the legal system has long accommodated settlement expansion. Settlers are governed by Israeli civilian law, while Palestinians are subject to military law, producing starkly unequal outcomes.

Although the court has occasionally ruled in favour of Palestinian petitioners, it has largely deferred to security arguments. In 2022, it rejected a petition to return Palestinian land in Hebron, citing Israel's "regional security doctrine", and has consistently upheld house demolition policies.

IMPACT ON PEACE

The implications extend well beyond the West Bank. Settlers have viewed the war in Gaza as an opportunity to accelerate displacement, forcing more than 1,000 Palestinians from at least 18 communities since October 2023. This violence-driven expansion undermines the viability of a two-state solution, even as it re-enters international discussions as part of post-war planning. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

US lifts sanctions on Brazilian SC Justice

WASHINGTON, 13 DEC

The US has removed Brazilian Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes from its sanctions list, initially imposed over his role in the trial of former president Jair Bolsonaro. De Moraes's wife and the Lex Institute were also delisted following conversations between US President Donald Trump and Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. The US Treasury had previously accused de Moraes of authorising arbitrary detentions and suppressing freedom of expression. A senior US official suggested that the passage of an amnesty bill in Brazil indicated an improvement in "lawfare" conditions. Lula's government hailed the decision as a "big defeat" for Bolsonaro's family, citing disinformation efforts against de Moraes. *—PTI*

Bulgaria to begin forming new Cabinet next week

SOFIA, 13 DEC

Bulgaria's President Rumen Radev will begin consultations with parliamentary groups next week to form a new cabinet after the collapse of the minority government amid nationwide anti-corruption protests. The government, led by Rosen Zhelyazkov, had survived six no-confidence motions since January but was brought down after tens of thousands took to the streets on Thursday. Radev will first invite the largest parliamentary group to attempt to form a government, followed by the second-largest if the first fails. If no viable cabinet emerges, he will appoint a caretaker government and call fresh elections within two months. Analysts expect another early poll — Bulgaria's eighth since 2021. *—PTI*

South Africa eases rules to enable Starlink's entry

CAPE TOWN, 13 DEC

South Africa's communications minister has adjusted regulations that previously mandated foreign-owned satellite companies, including Elon Musk's Starlink, to maintain 30 per cent local ownership. The new policy permits these companies to meet affirmative action criteria through "equity equivalent" programmes, such as training initiatives. Musk had accused South Africa of enforcing "openly racist ownership laws." This change is expected to encourage investment in South Africa's communications sector, aiming to improve internet access in underserved regions. US President Donald Trump has previously criticised South African affirmative action measures. *—PTI*

Fire burns Dhaka's 12-storey building, no casualties

DHAKA, 13 DEC

A massive fire erupted early Saturday in a 12-storey building in Bangladesh's capital, prompting urgent rescue operations. Officials reported that no casualties occurred during the blaze at Jabal E Nur Tower, where at least 42 people were evacuated. Responding firefighters received the alert at around 5:37am and utilised 18 units to control the flames. The building features commercial spaces on the lower floors, with residential apartments above. Firefighters encountered challenges as they forced open shutter locks, delaying the response time. The fire's exact origin remains under investigation, though locals suspect scrap clothes in the basement may have contributed. Bangladesh has faced numerous industrial disasters attributed to safety failures, raising concerns about building regulations and enforcement. *—PTI*

19 states sue US over $1,00,000 H1B fee

Call the 'massive' fee 'unlawful', say it will hurt economy

NEW YORK
WASHINGTON, 13 DEC

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Nineteen US states have sued the Trump administration over its "unlawful" decision to impose a USD 1,00,000 fee on new H1B visa petitions, warning that the move will worsen labour shortages in key sectors such as health care, education and technology.

New York Attorney General Letitia James, along with 18 other Attorneys Generals, on Friday filed the lawsuit in the US District Court for the District of Massachusetts, challenging what they termed a "massive" increase in H1B fees without legal authority or due process.

The H1B visa programme allows highly skilled foreign professionals to work temporarily in the US and is widely used by Indian nationals.

The coalition argued that the new fee would make the programme effectively inaccessible for government and non-profit employers that depend on H1B workers to provide essential services in health care, education, technology, and other fields.

"The administration's illegal attempt to ruin this programme will make it harder for New Yorkers to get health care, disrupt our children's education, and hurt our economy. I will keep fighting to stop this chaos and cruelty targeting immigrant communities," James said in a statement.

Joining James in the lawsuit are the attorneys general of Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin.

The Attorneys Generals contended that the move violates the Administrative Procedure Act as well as the Immigration and Nationality Act, as it was imposed without congressional approval or the required rule-making process.

In September, US President Donald Trump announced that his administration would levy a one-time USD 1,00,000 fee on all new H1B applications. *—PTI*

Trump sued over ballroom renovation

Trump was sued on Friday by preservationists asking a federal court to halt his White House ballroom project until it goes through multiple independent reviews, including an environmental assessments and wins approval from Congress. The East Wing has already been razed for renovation.

Newly released images show US President Donald Trump surrounded by women at convicted sex-trafficker Jeffery Epstein's estate *PHOTO: WH*

NOT A BIG DEAL: TRUMP PLAYS DOWN LATEST EPSTEIN PICS

WASHINGTON, 13 DEC

US President Donald Trump on Friday played down the recently released photograph showing him alongside convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, calling the matter "no big deal."

When asked about the newly released images by the House Oversight Committee, Trump said, "I haven't seen them, but everybody knew this man. He was all over Palm Beach. He has photos with everybody…. So that's no big deal. I know nothing about him".

The 19 photographs depicted prominent individuals including former president Bill Clinton, Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates, former White House strategist Steve Bannon and other high-profile figures. *—ANI*

Russian drone strikes caused blackouts in several regions of Ukraine *PHOTO: X@ZELENSKYYUA*

2 killed in Russia; blackouts in Ukraine

MOSCOW, 13 DEC

At least two people were killed in a drone attack in Russia's southwestern Saratov region, while Moscow's strikes left parts of Ukraine without power, local authorities said on Saturday. The fighting comes as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was set to meet US envoy Steve Witkoff to discuss Kyiv's counter-proposal for a peace deal.

The Ukrainian drone attack damaged a residential building, and several windows were also blown out at a kindergarten and clinic, Saratov regional Governor Roman Busargin said. Russia's defence ministry said on Saturday it had shot down 41 Ukrainian drones over Russian territory overnight.

In Ukraine, parts of the Kherson region, including the regional capital, also called Kherson, were without power Saturday following Russian strikes on energy infrastructure, regional head Oleksandr Prokudin said.

Kremlin adviser Yuri Ushakov said that Russian police and National Guard will stay on in eastern Ukraine's Donbas and oversee the industry-rich region, even if a peace settlement ends Russia's war. Ukraine is likely to reject such a stance.

Meanwhile, Zelenskyy visited the Kupyansk region and met Ukrainian armed forces. Zelenskyy said visited the region to prove that Russia hadn't captured the area, as it had claimed. The move assumes significance if Ukraine agrees to make any territorial concessions during a peace deal. *—Agencies*

Thai-Cambodia continue fighting despite Trump claiming peace

SURIN, 13 DEC

Fighting continued to rage on Saturday morning along the border of Thailand and Cambodia, even after US President Donald Trump declared that both countries agreed to renew a ceasefire.

Thai officials have said they did not agree to a ceasefire, and Cambodia has not commented on Trump's claim. Its Defence Ministry instead said Thai jets carried out airstrikes Saturday morning.

About two dozen people have officially been reported killed in this past week's fighting, while hundreds of thousands have been displaced on both sides of the border.

The Thai military acknowledges 11 of its troops have been killed, while estimating there have been 165 fatalities among Cambodian soldiers. Cambodia has not announced military casualties, but has said at least 11 civilians have been killed and 76 wounded.

Cambodia said Thailand's dropped bombs from F16 jets, destroying critical infrastructure *PHOTO: X@MINISTRYOFINFO1*

Trump, on Friday, after speaking to Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul and Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet, announced that both sides agreed to restart the July ceasefire, brokered also by Malaysia. Both Phnom Penh and Bangkok have repeatedly accused the other violating the agreement before fighting broke out last week. *—PTI*

Rwanda violated Congo peace deal: US

UNITED NATIONS, 13 DEC

Washington accused Rwanda on Friday of violating a US-brokered peace agreement by backing a new and deadly offensive in eastern Congo and warned that the Trump administration will take action against "spoilers" of the deal.

US Ambassador to the UN Mike Waltz' comments came as more than 400 civilians have been killed since the Rwanda-backed M23 rebels escalated their offensive in the South Kivu province in eastern Congo, according to regional officials. Rwandan special forces were in the strategic city of Uvira, they said.

Waltz told the UN Security Council that "Rwanda is leading the region towards increased instability and war," Waltz said. "We will use the tools at our disposal to hold to account spoilers to peace."

He called on Rwanda to uphold its commitments. *—PTI*

China uses water cannons against Filipino fishermen at disputed sea

MANILA, 13 DEC

Chinese coast guard ships used powerful water cannons against 20 Philippine fishing boats off a disputed South China Sea shoal, injuring three Filipinos and damaging two of their boats, the Philippine coast guard said on Saturday.

Chinese coast guard personnel operating rubber boats later cut the anchor lines of the Philippine boats on Friday off Sabina Shoal, "endangering the vessels and their crew amid high waves," the coast guard said.

Chinese officials did not comment on the flare-up in the South China Sea, but have vowed to defend their claimed territories.

The South China Sea, an important global trade route, is claimed almost entirely by China despite a 2016 arbitration ruling that declared Beijing's claim invalid, based on the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

China dismissed the ruling as a sham.

Two Philippine coast guard ships were deployed to help the Filipinos off Sabina but faced dangerous blocking manoeuvres by the Chinese coast guard.

The US has repeatedly warned that it is obligated to defend the Philippines, its oldest ally in Asia. *— PTI*

At least 30 people were killed in the hospital *PHOTO: X*

Ultras were using bombed hospital: Myanmar Army

BANGKOK, 13 DEC

Myanmar's military acknowledged that there was an airstrike on a hospital in Rakhine, which media reports said killed around 30 people, including patients, medical workers and children.

In a statement published by the state-run 'Global New Light of Myanmar' newspaper on Saturday, the military said armed groups, including the Arakan Army and the People's Defence Force and pro-democracy militias formed after the army takeover in 2021, used the hospital as their base.

It said the military launched a counter-terrorism operation against the hospital on Wednesday. It added that those killed were armed members of opposition groups, and not civilians.

A rescue services official in Rakhine said on Thursday that 34 people were killed and about 80 others were injured when an army jet dropped two bombs on the general hospital in Mrauk-U town, an area controlled by the Arakan Army (AA).

Mrauk-U, the country's largest city, was captured by the Arakan Army in February 2024. *—PTI*

'DIPLOMATIC SOLUTION'

Families of Pak fishermen held by India urge govt for release

India recently arrested 11 Pakistani fishermen for straying into its waters. At least 74 Pakistani fishermen are currently in Indian jails *PHOTO: ANI*

KARACHI, 13 DEC

The families of 11 Pakistani fishermen, including two teenage boys, who have been arrested by Indian maritime authorities this week, have appealed for their release.

The families urged the Pakistan government to get them released through diplomatic channels.

Ahmed Brohi, the father of one of the arrested fishermen, Ghulam Mustafa, said they all lived close to each other in Ibrahim Hyderi, a fishing village in west Karachi.

"We are all poor people, and we earn our livelihood through fishing. I urge the government to do something because we have already suffered a lot in the past," he said on Saturday.

Indian media reported that their Coast Guard had apprehended the 11 Pakistani fishermen on Wednesday after their boat was found inside Indian waters near Jakhau.

But the chairperson of the Sindh Fisheries Department, Fatima Majeed, said the fishermen might have accidentally crossed over into Indian territorial waters near Kajar Creek.

Since there is no visible demarcation in the Arabian Sea, Fatima said most of the arrests occur near the Kajar Creek or Sir Creek waters, which are close to Gujarat. Fatima added fishermen from both countries are often arrested there.

The fishermen arrested this time have two children, Zaheer and Habib, aged 12 and 15, respectively.

Around 74 Pakistani fishermen are in Indian jails. Pakistan and Indian governments regularly exchanged prisoners, and most of them were fishermen. However, the process has slowed down since last year due to the ongoing tensions. *—PTI*

Washington floods lead to dramatic rescues

BURLINGTON, 13 DEC

An atmospheric river unleashed over a foot (30 centimetres) of rain, leading to severe flooding across western and central Washington. Eddie Wicks, along with his wife, experienced the crisis first-hand as water rose alarmingly fast near the Snoqualmie River. "It was hours, not days," he recounted, noting the water surged 4 feet in just four hours. They were rescued by deputies aboard a boat as their home became submerged. Thousands have been forced to evacuate, with emergency officials conducting numerous water rescues from rooftops.

Despite the floods, no fatalities have been reported so far. Governor Bob Ferguson stated that President Donald Trump has approved an emergency declaration for the state. As of Friday morning, about 1,000 residents in Burlington were displaced, with reports of flooded homes reaching depths of 2 to 3 feet.

National Guard members have been canvassing neighborhoods to aid evacuations. Wicks fears it could take "a few days" for the water to recede, whilst authorities warn of potential levee failures and additional rain forecast for Sunday. *—PTI*

Floodwaters surge near a home after heavy rains in Washington *PHOTO: PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

India Post, BSE partner to broaden MF access in India

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

The Department of Posts (DoP) and the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to expand financial access in rural and semi-urban India, following the Budget 2025-26 announcement. Under the three-year agreement, selected postal employees will be trained and certified as mutual fund distributors, enabling them to assist customers with informed investment decisions and facilitate transactions via BSE StAR MF platform. BSE will support the process by providing Employee Unique Identification Numbers and facilitating NISM certification for postal officials. The partnership combines India Post's vast network with BSE's technology, aiming to increase mutual fund penetration in Tier-2, Tier-3, and rural areas. *—ANI*

SAIL posts 14% sales growth in April-Nov sales

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

The Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) recorded a 14 per cent year-on-year growth in sales at 12.7 million tonnes (MT) in April-November 2025, amid "price pressures and demand volatility." SAIL, a leading public sector integrated steel player, had sold 11.1 MT in the corresponding period last year. During the eight months, the company's retail sales hit 0.97 MT, up 13 per cent from the 0.86 MT in April-November 2024. In November, sales rose 27 per cent year-on-year, while retail sales surged by 69 per cent y-o-y. SAIL operates five integrated steel plants in the states of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and West Bengal with an overall capacity of around 20 million tonnes per annum. *—PTI*

Labour Codes may boost India's women workforce

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

The recently notified four labour Codes, effective from 21 November, 2025, have the potential to meaningfully expand women's participation in the workforce by making employment safer, more secure and more accessible, according to a white paper released by the All India Organisation of Employers (AIOE) in collaboration with law firm Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas. Titled "Breaking the Glass Ceiling: How the Labour Codes Boost Women's Participation in India's Workforce", the white paper noted that India's legal framework has evolved alongside social change, reflected in the rise in the female labour force participation rate from 23.3 per cent in 2017-18 to 41.7 per cent in 2023-24. *—ANI*

'55% of Indians plan winter trips; Goa, Kerala leads'

MUMBAI, 13 DEC

Around 55 per cent of Indian travellers plan winter trips every year, and Goa and Kerala remain top choices for them during the travel season, according to an Airbnb report. Indians are travelling in winter not just for holidays, but also to unwind and relax, the report said. Alongside these favourites, he said, there is also a strong momentum for emerging pockets such as Agatti in Lakshadweep, Guwahati, smaller cities in Punjab and lesser-known coastal or backwater towns in Kerala. This report by Airbnb is based on a survey conducted by Focaldata in October 2025 among 2,155 Indian respondents. The report further revealed that younger travellers are also driving interest in spiritual-leisure destinations like Varanasi and Vrindavan, creating a wider and more diverse winter map for India. *—PTI*

India warns action against Mexico's tariffs hike

India, Mexico engage to decide on 'raising tariffs unilaterally'

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

India has opposed Mexico's sudden plan to increase import tariffs up to 50 per cent on goods from nations without free trade agreements (FTA), warning of taking "appropriate measures" in order to protect its exporters, while maintaining diplomatic efforts, said sources.

Additionally, India is engaged with Mexico over the South American nation's decision to unilaterally raise tariffs on a number of products to find mutually beneficial solutions, even as New Delhi reserves the right to take appropriate measures to safeguard the interests of its exporters, an official said on Saturday.

These duties are imposed against countries that do not have free trade agreements with Mexico, including India, China, South Korea, Thailand and Indonesia.

The official said that India, in fact, was engaged with Mexico during the initial tabling of a bill in this regard.

PHOTO: FREEPIK

- The Embassy of India in Mexico raised the issue with the Ministry of Economy on 30 September 2025, itself, seeking special concessions to shield Indian exports from the new tariffs.

The Embassy of India in Mexico raised the issue with the Ministry of Economy on 30 September 2025, itself, seeking special concessions to shield Indian exports from the new tariffs.

Further, both the countries are looking to start negotiations for a free trade agreement, and terms of reference (ToR) to initiate the talks formally are expected to be finalised soon.

Experts said that the trade agreement will help insulate Indian companies from these tariffs, which were imposed under pressure from the US to align with America on increasing tariffs against China and prevent trans-shippment to America.

Under the decision, Mexico will impose steep import tariffs - ranging from about 5 per cent to as high as 50 per cent on a wide range of goods (about 1,463 tariff lines) from countries that do not have free trade agreements with Mexico, including India, China, South Korea, Thailand and Indonesia.

However, the list of items covered is yet to be officially notified. The higher duties will take effect on 1 January, 2026.

India's exports to Mexico stood at USD 5.75 billion in 2024-25, while imports were USD 2.9 billion. *—Agencies*

CANCELLATION CHAOS

Compensation payout to cost IndiGo Rs 500 crore

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

In a statement, Indigo announced that it will compensate more than Rs 500 crore in total to customers whose flights were cancelled within 24 hours of their departure.

"Our goal is to make this process of refunds as transparent, easy, and hassle-free as possible for you," the airline stated.

IndiGo also disclosed its ongoing efforts to "identify flights where customers were severely impacted and stranded at airports on 3, 4, and 5 December" and would reach out to those customers in January for smooth compensation.

This follows a significant operational challenges that led to thousands of cancellations, budget carrier IndiGo has stabilised its operations thanks to recent government intervention. Last week, the airline faced turmoil due to various reasons, including amendments to the Flight Duty Time Limitations (FDTL) order.

As of Friday, IndiGo reported operating over 2,000 flights daily, emphasising its commitment to compensating affected passengers.

Despite improvements, the airline cancelled around 160 flights on Friday from Delhi and Bengaluru due to continuing disruptions. "IndiGo has cancelled 159 flights on Friday from Delhi and Bengaluru," sources reported.

Additionally, IndiGo's board has enlisted an independent aviation expert, Captain John Illson of Chief Aviation Advisors LLC, to conduct a root-cause analysis of the recent operational disruptions. The review will commence shortly. *—Agencies*

India's forex reserves increase to $687.26 billion

NEW DEL, 13 DEC

India's foreign exchange reserves rose modestly by USD 1.033 billion to USD 687.26 billion in the week ending 5 December, supported by a jump in gold holdings, according to the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) latest data.

In recent weeks, the forex reserves have mostly been on a downtrend, with occasional gains. Nonetheless, the current level remains close to the all-time high of USD 704.89 billion recorded in September 2024.

Foreign currency assets (FCA), the largest component of reserves, stood at USD 556.88 billion, down USD 151 million from the previous week, while gold reserves increased to USD 106.984 billion. The rise in gold reflects strong global demand amid heightened uncertainties.

The RBI has maintained that India's foreign exchange reserves are sufficient to cover more than 11 months of merchandise imports, highlighting the resilience of the country's external sector.

Historically, India added around USD 58 billion to its reserves in 2023, following a cumulative decline of USD 71 billion in 2022. In 2024, reserves increased by just over USD 20 billion; while in 2025 they have grown by approximately USD 47–48 billion so far.

- Historically, India added around USD 58 billion to its reserves in 2023, following a cumulative decline of USD 71 billion in 2022.

Foreign exchange reserves, primarily held in US dollars with smaller amounts in euros, yen and pounds sterling, are actively managed by the RBI. The central bank intervenes in currency markets to stabilise the rupee, which has weakened by over 5 per cent so far this year.

Overall, the RBI remains confident that India can comfortably meet external financing requirements and sustain a robust external position despite global uncertainties. *—ANI*

Shiprocket aims to raise Rs 2,342 crore via IPO

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

Temasek-backed e-commerce enablement platform Shiprocket has filed updated draft papers with the markets regulator, SEBI, to raise over Rs 2,342 crore through its initial public offering (IPO). The offer comprises a fresh issue of equity shares worth up to Rgs1,100 crore and an offer for sale (OFS) of Rs 1,242.3 crore by existing shareholders, including Lightrock, Tribe Capital, Bertelsmann, Arvind Ltd, Gautam Kapoor, Saahil Goel, and Vishesh Khurana.

Proceeds from the IPO will be used to support Shiprocket's growth by investing in marketing initiatives and strengthening technology infrastructure across its core and emerging businesses. Part of the funds will also be utilised to repay borrowings, while some may fund acquisitions and general corporate purposes. The company may undertake a pre-IPO placement of up to Rs 220 crore, which would adjust the fresh issue size.

Shiprocket has evolved from a shipping provider into a full-stack e-commerce enabler for direct-to-consumer (D2C) brands and MSMEs. Its business operates through two segments: core domestic shipping solutions and emerging offerings, including cargo, cross-border logistics, marketing solutions, and hyperlocal deliveries. The company runs an asset-light, technology-driven model supported by a network of ecosystem partners. Axis Capital, BofA Securities India, JM Financial and Kotak Mahindra Capital are the book-running lead managers. *—PTI*

Geopolitical risks dominate Indian boardroom agendas: Report

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

Geopolitical instability has emerged as the most significant future risk for Indian businesses, with nearly 50 per cent of CXOs ranking it as the severest threat over the next five years, according to The Global Risk Atlas – New Realities by MGC Global Risk Advisory.

The report surveyed over 125 CXOs across 45 economies, spanning sectors such as manufacturing, services, BFSI, digital, consumer,

and infrastructure. It found that 70 per cent of business leaders expect "steady volatility" across six of nine major risk categories, while 59 per cent cited cyberattacks and data breaches as a top board-level concern.

AI governance has overtaken ESG as a key boardroom priority, driven by concerns over model bias, misinformation, and regulatory uncertainty.

Nearly two-thirds of firms acknowledged gaps in talent, innovation, and digital capabilities, increasing vulnerability to future shocks.Cyber security now surpasses physical security as the primary risk-control focus for Indian boards. *—ANI*

'India-EU trade set to transform apparel exports'

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

Indian garment manufacturer CTA Apparels has welcomed the Indian government's progress on the India–EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA), which is now at an advanced stage.

Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said negotiations have been "very positive", with both sides keen to conclude a mutually beneficial deal soon.

The European Union is India's second-largest apparel export market, accounting for around 27 per cent of garment exports worth over USD 7.5 billion annually.

Currently, Indian apparel exports face EU import duties of 8–12 per cent, unlike competitors such as Bangladesh, Vietnam and Turkey, which enjoy preferential access.

CTA Apparels said a well-structured FTA could reduce or remove these tariffs, improving India's price competitiveness and supporting the export of higher-value products.

Industry estimates suggest the agreement could lift India's apparel exports by 20–25 per cent over the next three years.

The FTA's focus on rules of origin, market access, sustainability and technical standards is expected to provide a stable framework for long-term investment in the textile value chain. *—ANI*

Adven is India's 1st homoeopathic brand to get Ayush Certification

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

Pharmaceutical firm Adven Biotech has announced that it is the first homoeopathic brand in India to receive the prestigious Ayush Premium Certification, a seal of quality for AYUSH products. This recognition positions the company at the forefront of world-class homoeopathic manufacturing, challenging the longstanding notion that high-quality products can only come from abroad.

This achievement aligns with the ongoing transformation of India's homoeopathic sector, driven by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Make in India' and 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' initiatives, which are positioning the AYUSH industry for international prominence. The Ministry of Ayush, in collaboration with the Ayush Export Promotion Council (AYUSHEXCIL), has launched the Ayush Quality Mark Programme to ensure certified brands adhere to stringent international standards of purity and safety.

Adesh Sharma, CEO of Adven Biotech, expressed pride in the certification, stating, "This recognition strengthens our mission to make scientifically validated, globally trusted homoeopathic medicines in India." He added that the certification reinforces their commitment to elevating Indian homoeopathy's standards. *—ANI*

CRISIL FORECASTS INDIA'S RETAIL INFLATION AT 2.5% FOR FY25-26

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

India's retail inflation, measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), is expected to average 2.5 per cent in the 2025-26 fiscal year as the base effect on food prices diminishes, according to Crisil.

The rating agency noted, "Weak global crude prices should continue anchoring fuel inflation, while GST rate cuts will support core inflation."

In November, CPI inflation rose to 0.7 per cent from 0.3 per cent in October, primarily due to a slowdown in deflation within the food and beverages category.

GST 2.0 COULD CUT RETAIL INFLATION: SBI

Furthermore, a report from SBI Research highlights that recent GST rationalisation has decreased CPI inflation by around 25 basis points from September to November 2025, with projections suggesting a total reduction of up to 35 basis points for the year. *—ANI*

SENDS SMS, EMAILS TO TAXPAYERS

Govt alerts against bogus political donation claims

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

The Income Tax department has started sending SMS and email advisories to taxpayers for wrongful deduction claims related to unrecognised political parties or charitable institutions, the finance ministry said on Saturday.

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) said through data analysis it has observed that huge amount of bogus claims have been made on account of donation to Registered Unrecognised Political Parties (RUPPs) or Charitable Institutions and reduced their tax obligations and have also claimed bogus refunds.

"A targeted NUDGE campaign has been launched as a taxpayer-friendly measure, providing them opportunity to update their ITRs and withdraw wrong claims, if any. SMSs and Email advisories are being issued from 12th December 2025 to such taxpayers on their registered mobile numbers and emails," the finance ministry said in a statement.

- CBDT's data analytics indicated that many taxpayers are suspected to be indulged in claiming deductions for donation made to suspicious entities or have not provided relevant information to ascertain the genuineness of the entities.

The CBDT said that evidence gathered from enforcement actions indicated that RUPPs, many of which were non-filers, non-operational at their registered addresses, and are not engaged in any political activity, were being used as conduits for routing funds, hawala transactions, cross border remittances, and issuing bogus receipts for donations. The CBDT carried out follow-up searches against some of these RUPPs and Trusts and gathered incriminating evidence in respect of bogus donations by individuals and bogus CSR by companies, it said.

CBDT's data analytics indicated that many taxpayers are suspected to be indulged in claiming deductions for donation made to suspicious entities or have not provided relevant information to ascertain the genuineness of the entities.

A large number of taxpayers have already revised their Income Tax Returns for the current AY that is 2025-26, and have filed updated ITRs for past years, it added. *—PTI*

Johnson & Johnson to pay $40M in talc cancer case

CALIFORNIA, 13 DEC

A jury in California has ordered Johnson & Johnson to pay $40 million (£32 million) in damages to two women who claimed the company's baby powder caused their ovarian cancer.

The Los Angeles Superior Court found that J&J had failed to warn consumers about the cancer risks associated with its talc-based products, awarding $18 million to Monica Kent and $22 million to Deborah Schultz and her husband.

Kent was diagnosed in 2014 and Schultz in 2018, both having used J&J's baby powder for four decades post-bathing. Their cancer treatments involved major surgeries and numerous chemotherapy sessions.

During the trial, attorney Andy Birchfield stated,

In response, J&J's attorney Allison Brown contended that the only claim linking their cancers to talc came from their lawyers, noting,

"They don't have the evidence in this case."J&J, facing over 67,000 lawsuits related to the issue, maintains its products are safe and asbestos-free. Following this verdict, the company plans to appeal, stating they expect to prevail in future cases. *—Agencies*

B'desh Under-19s clinch thrilling win over Afghanistan

DUBAI, 13 DEC

Bangladesh Under-19s registered a hard-fought three-wicket victory over Afghanistan Under-19s in their Group B encounter of the ACC Men's U19 Asia Cup, successfully chasing a challenging target of 284. Afghanistan Under-19s produced a strong batting performance after being put in, posting 283 for 7 from their 50 overs, built around a magnificent century from Faisal Khan Shinozada. Afghanistan made a steady start before consolidating through key partnerships in the middle overs. Shinozada anchored the innings with a composed 101 from 91 balls, striking eight fours and four sixes, while valuable support came from Osman SadatBangladesh Under-19s 284 for 7 (Abrar 96, Beg 62, Stanikzai 2-46) beat Afghanistan Under-19s 283 for 7 (Shinozada 103, Niazai 44, Shahriar 2-43) by three wickets. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X/@WBBL

WBBL 2025: Hobart beat Perth to claim maiden title

DUBAI, 13 DEC

Hobart Hurricanes claimed its first Women's Big Bash League title after it pulled off a comfortable eight-wicket win over Perth Scorchers in the WBBL 2025 final on Saturday. Hurricanes opener Lizelle Lee scored a 44-ball 77 to guide her side to the win after a disciplined bowling effort restricted Scorchers to just 137/5 in the first innings. Left-arm spinner Linsey Smith and medium pacer Heather Graham took two wickets apiece to restrict the Scorchers' batting effort after they elected to bat. Sophie Devine (33) and Beth Mooney (34) were the top scorers for Scorchers, but neither of them could accelerate after a slow start, resulting in their side settling for a subpar total.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X/@AO

Won't be able to play Australia Open: Nadal

SYDNEY, 13 DEC

Rafael Nadal has undergone surgery to treat pain and gain mobility in his right hand, the retired tennis great said on Friday. The 22-time Grand Slam champion, who plays left-handed, said in an X post that he had been dealing with the issue "for a long time." Nadal accompanied the social media post with a photo of himself with his right arm bandaged and in a sling. He also quipped that he "won't be able to play the Australian Open, " the first major of next year. The surgery was "aimed at relieving pain and restoring mobility" of the joint at the base of his right thumb, according to a separate statement from Nadal's representative.—*PTI*

PCB extends deadline to submit bids for two new PSL teams

KARACHI, 13 DEC

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has extended the deadline for investors to buy the two new teams in the Pakistan Super League (PSL) by one week. PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi announced that bids can be submitted until 22 December, instead of 15 December.He claimed that the interest being shown by prospective investors from the United States, the UK, and the Gulf Countries in the two new teams of the PSL was heartening for the board. "The growing interest of foreign investors in the PSL is encouraging, and we are waiting to welcome the owners of the two new franchises soon.—*PTI*

A three-match audition starts for Gill

3rd T20I: Prolonged poor form of skipper Suryakumar Yadav coming under the scanner

DHARAMSALA, 13 DEC

The countdown to save his place in the playing XI begins for a beleaguered Shubman Gill, who is likely to get three matches against South Africa to prove his worth before the Indian team management switches to a 'Plan B' ahead of the T20 World Cup, starting in six weeks.

As India gears up to play the third T20I against the Proteas on Sunday in sub-10-degree temperatures in the lap of the ice-clad Dhauladhar range, things are suddenly heating up in the Indian dressing room, with the **prolonged poor form of skipper Suryakumar Yadav coming under the scanner**.

Worse, his deputy Shubman Gill, who was pushed into the XI at the expense of a settled Sanju Samson, is not inspiring much confidence.

Shubman Gill and captain Suryakumar Yadav *PHOTO: PTI*

The South African pace attack featuring Anrich Nortje, Marco Jansen, Lungi Ngidi, Ottniel Baartman and Lutho Sipamla has shown how to bowl on Indian tracks, and the HPCA Stadium strip, offering extra bounce and some movement off the surface, will certainly keep them interested. Among all T20 sides, South Africa, in terms of personnel, appears to have the requisite balance to win the trophy in the Indian subcontinent this time. Quinton de Kock's return, along with the likes of Aiden Markram, Dewald Brevis, Donovan Ferreira, David Miller and all-rounder Jansen, gives their batting an intimidating look.

With only eight games, starting from the third T20I, left before the start of the T20 World Cup title defence, India's under-fire head coach Gautam Gambhir won't be able to afford two out-of-form top-order batters in the starting line-up.

Most players are ready to bat anywhere: Tilak Varma

India batter Tilak Varma on Saturday underlined the team management's push for a flexible batting order, saying most players are ready to bat anywhere depending on match situations. The hosts eye an edge in the five-match T20I series against South Africa, locked 1-1 ahead of the third game to be played here on Sunday. "Everyone is flexible except the openers. I am up for batting at 3, 4, 5, or 6 wherever the team prefers for me," Tilak said during the pre-match press conference.

"If the team feels a particular move is tactically best, everyone goes with the team." —*PTI*

INDIA VS SOUTH AFRICA T20I

INDIA vs SOUTH AFRICA
Match starts at
7 pm IST

HEAD TO HEAD @ DHARAMSALA

PLAYED:	35
INDIA WON:	18
SA WON:	13
NO RESULT	4

JioStar dismisses exit buzz, says ICC deal remains in force

JioStar and the International Cricket Council (ICC) have come together to quash speculation surrounding the broadcaster's involvement in their current media rights agreement in India, emphasising that the partnership remains secure for the 2024–2027 cycle.In a joint clarification issued on Friday, both organisations addressed recent reports that hinted at uncertainty over JioStar's role as the ICC's media rights holder in the Indian market. These reports, they said, do not reflect their actual position. The existing agreement between the ICC and JioStar remains fully in force, and JioStar continues as the ICC's official media rights partner in India.

Pak to protest exclusion of Agha from T20 WC poster

KARACHI, 13 DEC

The Pakistan Cricket Board is unhappy with the International Cricket Council after the global governing body released a promotional poster of next year's T20 World Cup ticket sales without the country's captain, Salman Ali Agh, on it. A reliable source in the PCB said the matter had been taken up with the ICC as the promotional poster featured only five captains: Suryakumar Yadav (India), Aiden Markram (South Africa), Mitchell Marsh (Australia), Dasun Shanaka (Sri Lanka), and Harry Brook (England).

"We faced the same issues when the Asia Cup was held a few months back, and that time the broadcasters had started a promotional campaign without our captain featuring in it," the source said.

He said it was only after the PCB spoke to the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) that the situation changed.

"We are facing a similar situation this time as the ICC has not projected our captain on the promotional poster for ticket sales," he added.

He said that while Pakistan was not in the top five teams in the ICC T20 rankings, it had a rich legacy and remains one of the top draws in the World Cup. —*PTI*

Salah back in Liverpool squad after talks with Slot

LIVERPOOL, 13 DEC

Mohamed Salah returned to Liverpool's squad for the Premier League match against Brighton on Saturday after holding talks with manager Arne Slot.

Salah was named as a substitute for the game at Anfield.

The Egypt forward's future was thrown into doubt last weekend when, in an explosive outburst to reporters, he said his relationship with Slot had broken down after being dropped for three straight games and that he felt like "someone doesn't want me in the club."

Salah was then left at home when Liverpool traveled to Inter Milan for a Champions League match on Tuesday, with Slot saying he did not know if Salah would play again for the club.

Salah was an unused substitute for the 3-3 draw with Leeds last Saturday, after

which he opened up on his frustrations. Before that, he'd been an unused sub in a win at West Ham and came on at halftime of a home draw against Sunderland.

Salah is Liverpool's biggest star and also the club's record scorer in the Premier League. He has four league goals in 13 appearances this season.

He is due to head off to the Africa Cup of Nations next week and said last week he did not know what would happen while he was away. —*PTI*

For Noah, an all-or-nothing mentality is way forward

PUNE, 13 DEC

For Olympics 100m gold medallist and multiple-time world champion American sprinter Noah Lyles, the 2026 season and beyond will be about having an "all-or-nothing" mentality.

Lyles, who aims to beat the legendary Usain Bolt's records in the 100m and 200m events, says his new approach would demand his body to produce something never happened before as he looks to make the most of the home Olympics LA28 Games.

"I would say I'm starting 2026 with a jump-off-the-cliff mentality. If I had to give a little more detail, it's all or nothing. There's no in-between," Lyles, a brand ambassador for the Bajaj Pune Marathon, told PTI in an exclusive interview here on Saturday."There's no one foot in, one foot out. It's all or nothing. That's the type of mentality that I'm coming into 2026 with. —*PTI*

ODISHA MASTERS

Hooda, Isharani reach women's final

CUTTACK, 13 DEC

Top seed Unnati Hooda and compatriot Isharani Baruah set up a women's singles final clash at the Odisha Masters Super 100 after registering contrasting semifinal victories here on Saturday.

The 18-year-old Hooda, a winner of the 2022 edition and 2023 Abu Dhabi Masters, was stretched by former junior world No. 1 Tasnim Mir before prevailing 18-21, 21-16, 21-16 in a hard-fought encounter that lasted an hour.

After conceding the opening game, Hooda raised her intensity, controlled the rallies better, and showed superior temperament in the closing stages of the next two games to book her place in the final.

In the other semifinal, Assam's Isharani produced a strong comeback to defeat Tanvi Hemanth 18-21, 21-7, 21-7. In the men's singles, second seed Kiran George and Rounak Chouhan, who were part of India's historic World Junior Championships medal-winning squad, will clash in the semifinal to decide the finalist.

In the mixed doubles semifinals, India's S. Kanapuram and R. Uthayasooriyan bowed out after going down 16-21, 19-21 to fifth seeds Dejan Ferdinansyah and B. Wardana of Indonesia.

The Indonesian pair kept their composure in both games, handling pressure situations better to seal a straight-game victory and progress to the final. —*PTI*

SHOOTING NATIONALS

Olympian Raiza Dhillon claims golden double in skeet

NEW DELHI, 13 DEC

Paris Olympian Raiza Dhillon gave a commanding performance on way to clinching the skeet gold in both women's senior and junior categories in the National Shooting Championship here Saturday.The 21-year-old shot 56 in the women's final to secure the top-podium place ahead of Yashasvi Rathore, who settled for silver with 55.

Fellow Olympian Ganemat Shekhon finished third after shooting down 45 targets. Darshna Rathore (36), Risham Kaur Guron (27), and Vanshika Tiwari (18) finished fourth, fifth, and sixth, respectively. Earlier in the qualification round, Yashavi topped the standings with 118 hits while Raiza and Ganemat shot 116 each, with the former finishing second on a shoot-off score of plus-5, while Ganemat was placed third at plus-4. —*PTI*

Mbappe back for Alonso's depleted Real

LONDON, 13 DEC

Real Madrid coach Xabi Alonso said Kylian Mbappe is fit to play on Sunday against Alaves in La Liga, as his depleted team bids to turn around a run of bad results.

Mbappe missed the Champions League defeat by Manchester City on Wednesday, which left Madrid with just two wins in its last eight games, and Alonso at

risk of the sack.

"We've got Kylian back, he's ready to play, and tomorrow we'll see and decide (if he starts), that's good news obviously," Alonso said on Saturday. Real Madrid is without several injured players for the game in Vitoria, including Trent Alexander-Arnold, Dani Carvajal, and Eduardo Camavinga.

Fran Garcia, Alvaro Carreras, and Endrick are also suspended. Defender Dean Huijsen is likely to return for the clash at Alaves, which could define Alonso's future. —*PTI*

OLDEST WINNER AT AGE 41

Lindsey Vonn placed 2nd in a WC downhill

ST MORITZ, 13 DEC

The 41-year-old American finished second in a World Cup downhill on Saturday, a day after becoming the oldest winner in the circuit's history.

After winning the season's opening downhill by nearly a full second on Friday, Vonn was beaten by only one racer this time: Emma Aicher of Germany was 0.24 seconds faster.

Vonn attributed a mistake landing a jump midway down her run for the gap, when she nearly lost her balance for an instant and leaned heavily on her left leg to raise herself back up."I'm a little bit tired from yesterday, there was a lot of emotion," Vonn told Swiss broadcaster RTS.

"I thought I skied pretty well on top, then I was just out of balance, and I fell on my hip.

Yeah, didn't ski the bottom the way I wanted to."Sofia Goggia, the 2018 Olympic champion from Italy, finished third, 0.29 behind, and Breezy Johnson, the American world champion, was fourth, 0.40 back.Vonn, who is preparing for the Milan Cortina Olympics, went into first position with her run down the sun-drenched Corviglia

course. But the 22-year-old Aicher came down next and quickly pushed Vonn out of the leader's seat.

Vonn returned to skiing last season after nearly six years of retirement, following a partial replacement surgery on her right knee, which included inserting two pieces of titanium. Vonn's results are shaping up to make her a top medal contender at the Olympics and able to compete with skiers half her age.

Women's Alpine skiing at the Feb. 6-22 Winter Games will be contested at Cortina d'Ampezzo, where Vonn holds the record of 12 World Cup wins. —*PTI*

WILL JOSH HAZLEWOOD CONSIDER TEST RETIREMENT AFTER ASHES DISAPPOINTMENT?

LONDON, 13 DEC

Australia quick Josh Hazlewood intends to continue playing international cricket in all formats despite missing the entire Ashes series because of injury.

At 34, Hazlewood was one of six Australian players considered to be approaching the twilight, and maybe the end, of their Test careers during the Ashes series. Hazlewood's involvement ended up being stymied by a hamstring injury on the eve of the series, compounded by an Achilles problem as he returned to bowling with the squad.

Despite missing out on the series, Hazlewood said he was determined to continue to represent his country with both red and white ball."Yeah, absolutely," he told Sydney's Daily Telegraph. "My body still feels as strong as ever. It's just little things here and there that creep in. I'm still determined to play three formats as best I can."You're still going to miss the odd game here and there; no one can do it all, unless you're a batter, but I still enjoy all the different demands of the three formats. —*PTI*